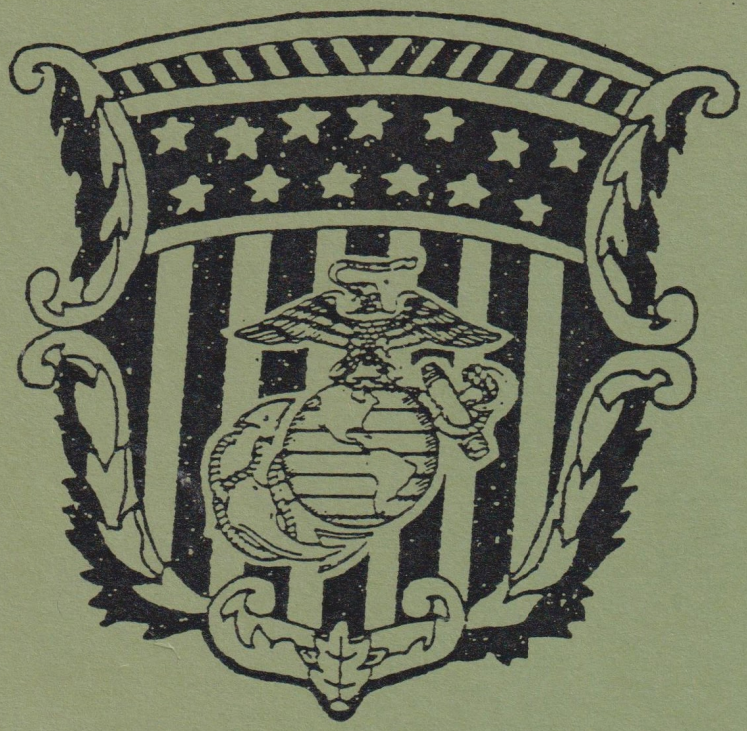
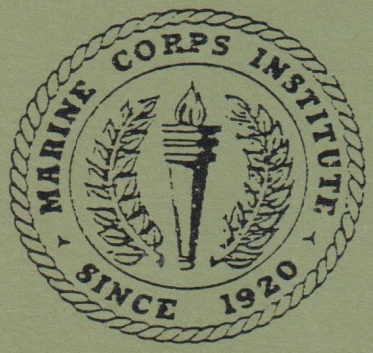
WARFIGHTING SKILLS PROGRAM



COMBAT TECHNIQUES



MARINE BARRACKS
WASHINGTON, D.C.

MCI 7403A

MCI 7403A

COMBAT TECHNIQUES

Marine Corps Institute, Washington, D. C.

1991

Warfighting Skills Program

STUDENT INFORMATION

This information is provided to assist you in completing your course/program of study. For additional information, refer to the MCI Procedures Manual.

1. **Course Procedure:**

a. Read the text. Complete the chapter review exercise as you finish each chapter. It's important that you take the time to answer each question in the review exercise thoroughly. When you check the review exercise answer key, don't try to memorize the text solutions. Instead, pick out the key concepts in each answer and make sure you can express them in your own words. Use examples to highlight these concepts. The exam questions are similar to those in the review exercises. *You will not do well on the exam unless you do the review exercises properly*!

b. Once you complete the text and feel that you are ready for the exam, report to your commanding officer. Your commanding officer will designate a testing officer to both administer and grade the exam. The exam includes 10 essay and problem-solving questions, and you will be allowed 1.5 hours to complete it. You will not be allowed to use your text or any notes during the exam. Your testing officer will notify both you and MCI of your score. To pass the exam, you need to score at least 75%.

c. The appendices located at the back of the text are included only for your information. You are not responsible for this material in the course exam, although you may find it useful.

2. **Receipt of Examinations at MCI.** If you pass the primary exam, MCI enters the completion in the Marine Corps Manpower Management System (MMS). If you fail the primary exam, an alternate exam is automatically mailed to your commanding officer. If you fail both the primary and the alternate exams, an administration notice card (MCI-R6) is forwarded to your unit. The training officer makes an entry on the MCI-R5 card and has the SRB clerk note your Service Record Book/Officer Qualification Record (SRB/OQR). You are then administratively deleted from the remaining courses of the program. If you still desire to complete the program, you must ENROLL as a new student and submit copies of course completion certificates to receive prior credit.

3. **Disenrollment.** Disenrollment occurs upon reaching the Course Completion Deadline (CCD) date or the Adjusted Course Completion Deadline (ACCD) date (6-month extension) for the program. Reenrollment will be granted upon request within 3 months after disenrollment if a reenrollment was not previously granted for the program.

a. You will be disenrolled if you do not complete your course by the course completion deadline (CCD). To avoid this, ask your training officer/NCO to request a six month extension allowing you more time to complete your course/program.

b. If you already have a six month extension and still cannot complete your course by your adjusted course completion deadline, you will automatically be disenrolled from the program. If you wish to continue the program, ask your training officer/NCO to reenroll you. **You are allowed only one extension and one reenrollment!**

4. **Program Completion.** A certificate of completion and a letter of transmittal with the course grade are forwarded to the commanding officer of each Marine who successfully completes a Warfighting Skills course. The commanding officer has the completion recorded in the student's SRB or OQR and presents the certificate to the student. The certificate and the letter are mailed directly to the supervisor of non-Marines and a daily completions listing is sent to the Marine Corp Reserve Center (IRR). Upon successful completion of **all courses**, a program diploma is forwarded to your commanding officer who presents it to you at an appropriate ceremony.

5. **Reserve Retirement Credits.** Reserve retirement credits are awarded **only** to inactive duty personnel upon successful completion of each course. Reserve retirement credits are earned at the rate of one credit for every 3 hours of estimated student effort. The total number of reserve retirement credits is indicated on the course title page and is awarded upon the successful completion of the course. Credits are not awarded for MCI study performed during drill periods if they are also awarded for drill attendance.

6. **Mail-Time Delay.** If you do not receive a requested service within 30 days, call or write to MCI.

7. **Information/assistance From MCI.** Further information is found in the current MCI Procedures Manual. If you have a question about the **content** of a course/program, call commercial (202) 433-4109/4110 or autovon 288-4109/4110. For **administrative assistance**, use the enclosed MCI-R11/14 or the Unit Activity Report (UAR) or call commercial (202) 433-2299 or autovon 288-4175.

8. **Student Data.** If you need to request a change to your student data in the MCI database, e.g., rank, change of address, use the MCI-R11k (Old MCI-R14 Student Request/Inquiry) located at the end of each text.

9. **Course Evaluation Questionnaire.** Please take a few minutes to complete and return the course questionnaire located at the end of this course.

PROGRAM:	WARFIGHTING SKILLS PROGRAM
COURSE:	*Combat Techniques* MCI-7403A (1991)
ESTIMATED STUDENT EFFORT:	9 hours
RESERVE RETIREMENT CREDITS:	3
PURPOSE:	To teach you small unit level techniques for leading, moving, attacking, and defending.
SCOPE:	This course covers the concepts behind developing techniques, leadership techniques, movement techniques, techniques for attacking, techniques for defending, and how to train subordinates in techniques.

WARFIGHTING SKILLS PROGRAM

PROGRAM OUTLINE

COURSE NUMBER	COURSE	ESTIMATED HOURS	RESERVE RETIREMENT CREDITS
7401	Tactical Fundamentals	12	4
7402	Small Unit Tactical Problems Problems	9	3
7403	COMBAT TECHNIQUES	9	3
7404	Marine Corps Leadership	18	6
7405	Combined Arms	6	2

Note: These are the courses currently in the Warfighting Skills Program. Disregard program outlines in any course texts you may have received previously. New courses will be added to the program as they are developed. However, you are responsible to complete **only** those courses listed above and any others that are open **on the date you enroll in the program** in order to get a Warfighting Skills Program diploma. If you have completed the program and wish to take courses that were added to the program after your enrollment date, you must enroll in the new courses **individually**. If you are unsure about which courses you must complete to receive a program diploma, check with your training NCO.

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INTRODUCTION

In *Tactical Fundamentals*, you learned that tactics is the process of reaching a decision. It is the creative ability to combine knowledge and techniques to derive a solution for a unique situation. You learned the fundamentals of tactics--reference points to guide your thinking--such as tempo, surfaces and gaps, and the ambush mentality, among others.

In *Small Unit Tactical Problems*, you exercised military judgment by applying tactical concepts in situational problems. You learned that *all situations are unique* --that the solution you used in one situation may not work in another. This course takes you a step further. It will teach you that the **techniques** which you use in combat must be flexible enough to allow you to master these unique situations.

Before going further, let's use a hypothetical example to explain what we mean by combat techniques.

Let's assume that you face an enemy that is aggressive to the point of rashness. You decide to exploit this weakness by drawing the enemy into a trap. After considering the peculiarities of the terrain, the troops, and weapons available to you and what you know about the enemy, you choose to set this trap in the form of an L-shaped ambush. That particular form of ambush is the technique that you use to execute your decision. In other words, techniques are the means by which you transform your tactical decisions into action.

One way to better understand **techniques** is to compare them with **procedures** --step by step methods of performing common tasks. Procedures are usually derived from the technical characteristics of equipment. For example, there are standard procedures for adjusting mortar fire, donning and clearing a gas mask, and changing a barrel on an M-60 machinegun. Usually, procedures don't change until you change or modify equipment. But techniques are derived from the dynamics of the battlefield. While procedures can often be found in the appropriate technical manual, techniques must often be developed by the Marine "on the spot." The major cause of these differences is the presence of the **enemy**. The success or failure of a particular type of single envelopment depends largely on what the enemy does or fails to do. The same is true for techniques of movement, of setting up defenses and of allocating fire support.

But don't confuse techniques with tactics. Although techniques are situational, they still follow basic patterns. In the example described above, the L-shaped ambush is a basic ambush technique. You'll find that the basic pattern for this technique is useful in many situations, although you must modify it as the enemy, terrain, and your own forces change from situation to situation. However, your tactics must never follow patterns. If they do, you become predictable--something that guarantees to put you on the road to defeat.

This course will do two things for you. First, it will teach you how to design techniques that will work in combat. Second, it will give you a large number of building blocks that you can modify into techniques that fit your particular combat situation.

As a leader of Marines, you should have a large "bag of tricks" that you can unleash upon the enemy. This course will teach you many techniques that have worked in the past and will thus add much to that "bag of tricks." More importantly, this course teaches you how to acquire, modify, and, if necessary, discard techniques. After all, if you can only teach techniques rather than change them to keep one step ahead of the enemy, you may prove to be an effective drillmaster, but you will never be a successful combat leader.

CHAPTER 1

DEVELOPING TECHNIQUES

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON TECHNIQUES

Techniques are as old as warfare itself. But by looking at techniques in modern times, from the 18th century onward, you can see three important trends:

--Techniques have ever-shorter "lives," that is, they change more often, especially in wartime.

--Small units, battalion and smaller, must master an ever-increasing range of techniques.

--The rank at which new techniques must be developed through innovation becomes more and more junior.

In the 18th century, a basic battlefield technique might last for 100 years or more. A good example is "forming square." When an infantry unit was threatened with an attack by cavalry, it defended itself by forming a square (see chapter two in *Tactical Fundamentals*). Regardless of what side of the square it attacked, the cavalry was faced with a solid wall of bayonets. Because it was based on a characteristic common to animals--the fact that horses are reluctant to impale themselves--the square remained an effective technique for nearly two hundred years. The same is true of most other battlefield techniques of that time: attacking in line, movement in column, deploying from column into line, etc.

By the 19th century, changes in weapons were becoming much more frequent than they had been in the 18th century. As each side in a conflict devised new ways of using new weapons and as both sides came to realize the capabilities of their new weapons, techniques changed more rapidly. For example, in the Civil War, at the Battle of Bull Run in 1862, both sides formed up much as they would have in Napoleon's time. But by 1864, the defenders on a battlefield were often entrenching. The much longer range of the rifled musket, compared to the Napoleonic smooth bore, gave the defender a reason to protect himself from the enemy's fire, which the attacker could not do. That advantage for the defender increased, until by World War I it dominated the battlefield.

By World War II, the pace at which techniques changed had increased markedly. New weapons, such as hollow-charge anti-tank weapons, quickly created a demand for new techniques. Each side was constantly working to find ways to beat the enemy's techniques, which meant the enemy then also had to change. Armies often found themselves fighting in parts of the world they had never prepared for, where terrain and weather demanded new techniques.

Today, you can be certain that techniques will change often, especially in combat. For example, in wars such as Vietnam or El Salvador, the guerrillas quickly learned to mine and booby-trap the trails. The forces fighting the guerrillas then had to learn how to move off the trails. As a result, the guerrillas had to develop a new technique because their opponents were moving off the trails. It is a never-ending cycle!

Remember, techniques still follow patterns. You can still rehearse and practice them. But while an 18th century pattern might last 100 years or more, today, depending on how often the enemy presents you with something new or with an effective technique to counter the one you have been using, the new technique which you develop may last only months, weeks, even just days.

The second change that has occurred over time is that small units have had to master an ever-wider range of techniques. In 1914, a rifle company was just that. Every man in it was armed with a rifle, except the officers, who carried pistols. By 1918, the same sort of unit had, in addition to rifles, light machineguns, sub-machine guns, hand grenades, grenade launchers, mortars, light cannons, and in many cases, attached weapons such as flame throwers and heavy machineguns. Today, in addition to these, the company has organic rocket weapons such as LAWS, SMAWS, and AT-4s, and may have attached anti-aircraft weapons such as the Stinger.

Each of these weapons has certain techniques for its employment. Further, when you combine these weapons to achieve the effects of combined arms, the number of possible techniques increases. For example, not only do you have techniques for using machineguns and the grenade launcher separately, you have techniques for using them together.

Compared to the purely rifle-armed company of 1914, the company today has a vastly wider range of techniques it must master. In fact, the squad of today has a wider range of weapons than the company did in 1914, which means it must master an increasing range of techniques.

This leads to the third major change: Because of the diverse range of weapons now at the small unit level, the rank at which new techniques must be developed through innovation has become much more junior. Before 1914, the battalion commander was probably the most junior officer who had to think about devising new techniques. With only one type of weapon, the rifle, the opportunity for innovation was rare below the battalion level. Since today's squad leader has many types of weapons in his squad--rifles, grenades, grenade launchers and SAWS, among others--he has many opportunities to innovate. He can use a variety of weapons, which give him a true combined arms capability, in a wide variety of ways.

Remember: Innovation in techniques is very important for winning in combat. And when a squad leader, platoon leader, or company commander finds something new that works, he has a responsibility to inform his fellow Marines of what he has discovered. They are part of the same team, and he wants the whole team to win. So innovation now often begins with the most junior leaders and flows both upward and also laterally--from one squad leader to another or from one platoon commander to another--so that others can make use of it.

This history is important to you because it tells you what you need to be able to do. You must master a wide range of techniques to fit the wide variety of weapons and their capabilities. Of course, you must train your Marines carefully and thoroughly in techniques, so they are masters of them. And you must realize that because techniques in modern war change frequently, you must always look for new techniques--developing them yourself and learning them from your fellow Marines.

How can you do this? You will begin to learn the answer to that question in the next section when you look at what influences techniques.

INFLUENCES ON TECHNIQUES

In the 18th century, if you had been an NCO or a junior officer, you would have learned techniques in your early training and then been set for life. Little if anything you learned at the beginning would have changed during your years in service. As you saw in the previous section, this is no longer true. Today, techniques change often, and **you** share the responsibility for changing them. That means you cannot just learn techniques. You also have to learn what lies **behind** the techniques--what influences techniques. You have to learn about these influences on techniques

because they are the most likely sources of change in techniques. This includes any changes you may devise.

In this section, you will learn the four most common things that influence techniques--weapons and equipment, terrain, tactics, and people. Once you understand each of these factors thoroughly, you will be able to better devise new techniques to meet the challenges that the battlefield presents. Let's look at each factor and its effects.

Weapons and Equipment

You can easily see the influence of weapons on techniques. The techniques for using tanks are different from those for using light armored vehicles, just as the techniques for the tactical employment of AV-8B Harriers are different from the techniques for using F/A-18 Hornets.

The infantry technique of maneuvering by fire teams is a good example of how introducing a particular type of weapon forces a change in techniques. In World War I, the Spanish Civil War, and World War II, infantry squads that had been trained to move and fight as indivisible units changed their way of fighting soon after they were equipped with light machineguns. Before the light machinegun, a relatively large number of rifle-armed infantrymen, eight or more, had to provide the "critical mass" of fire needed to suppress an enemy machinegun position. However, small unit leaders soon discovered that a smaller team of two to four men armed with a light machinegun could do the job just as well and provide the enemy with less of a target. That left the squad with enough men to maneuver to wipe out the machinegun position with hand grenades, rockets, and flame throwers.

To be flexible in techniques, to keep your techniques up to date and to innovate, you have to be a true master of all your weapons. You must know in detail what they can do and also what they **cannot** do. And you must thoroughly understand your weapons from the impact and effect of the bullet or shell **backwards** to you and your unit. Remember, techniques relate **outward** to the enemy. So you need to know what effect your weapons have--or don't have--on **him**.

For example, let's suppose that you are about to engage a Soviet-made T-55 medium tank with an AT-4. Because the greatest degree of armor protection is on the front of the tank's hull and turret, you want to engage the tank on its flank, rear, or undercarriage. You also know the location of its ammunition and internal fuel tanks (see figure 1-1), so for a flank engagement, you choose the forward section of the hull as your aiming point. If you get a rear shot, you know that the tank's engine compartment is the most vulnerable spot, so you aim for that. You also know the vehicle's visual dead space when he's "buttoned up" (see figure 1-2), so you know which direction is best for approaching the tank if you can stop him and keep him buttoned up.

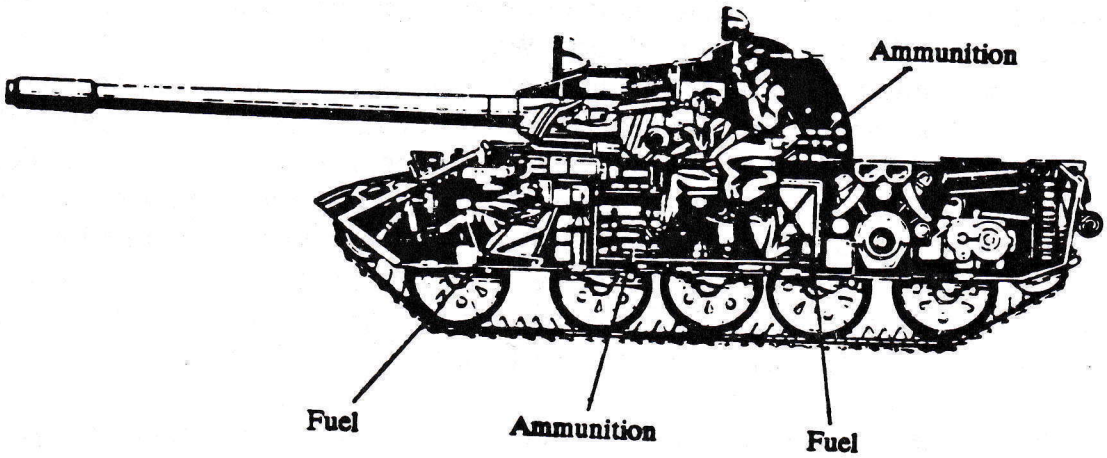


Fig 1-1. Cutaway of a T-55 medium tank.

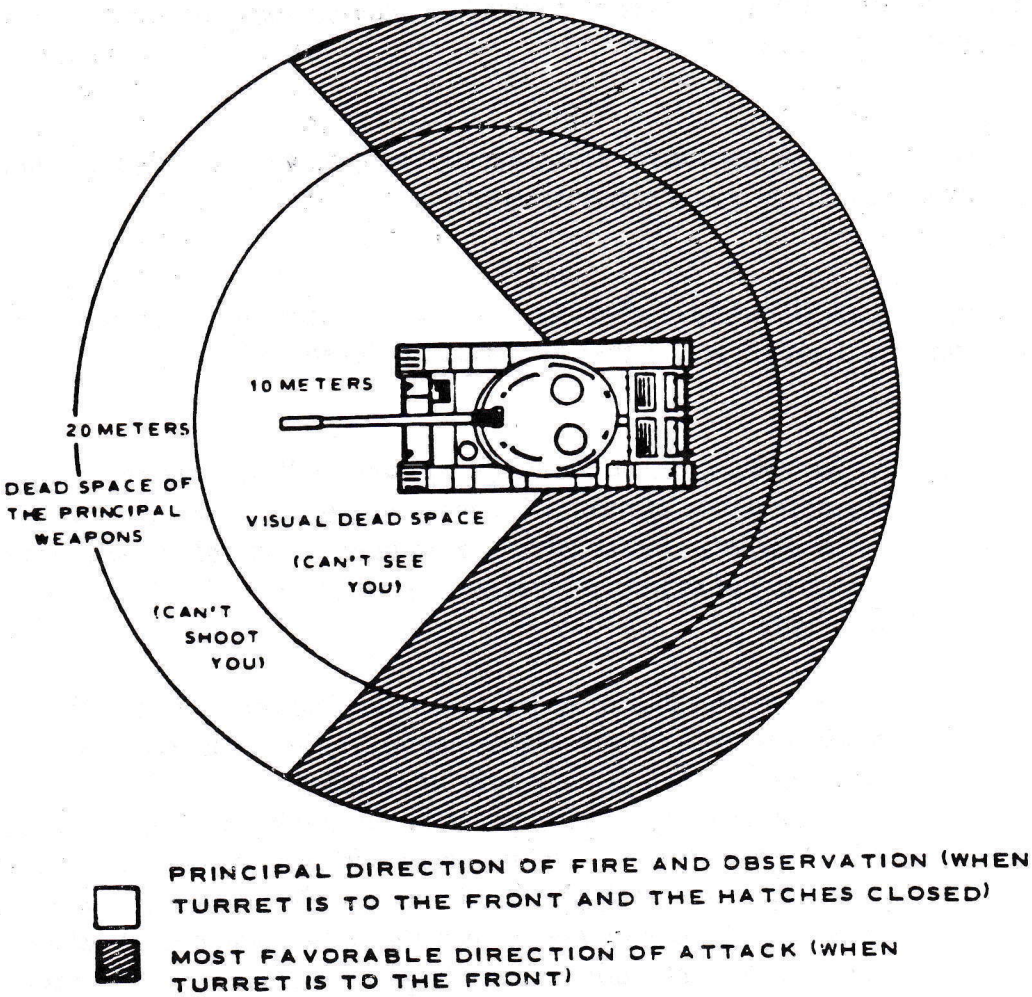


Fig 1-2. Tank dead space.

Your AT-4 fires an 84mm rocket that, under ideal conditions, can penetrate about 17 inches of homogenous steel. But from what you know about the T-55, it's highly unlikely that a frontal shot would penetrate its armor. Therefore, you position yourself for a flank shot that is within the AT-4's range: 25-300 meters. You hope to get a first round "kill"; however, if you can at least disable the tank by destroying the engine or knocking off a tread, you will close with the tank from its blind side and "kill it" with a second or third AT-4 round while other Marines in your unit keep the crew buttoned up with small arms fire.

Now, taking this example as a model, think about each weapon in your unit from the same perspective. Develop a detailed understanding of each of your weapons based on this model.

Note: *In your examination for this course, you may be asked to show your understanding of any weapon in your unit.*

In his book *About Face*, Col. David Hackworth describes an innovative technique for using the starlight scope that his battalion developed in Vietnam:

> *So meanwhile, they'd stopped playing ball with our snipers in the observation towers. We needed a new gimmick. I called in Larry Tahler . . . and asked him to have a think about this idea I had, to put snipers on choppers. In short order, "Night Hunter" was born.*
>
> *Two snipers and three helicopters--a slick and two gunships--made up each Night Hunter team. The choppers flew in blackout, the slick just a couple of hundred meters off the deck, its sniper passengers lying prone in the back, checking out the crisscrossing Delta canals and trails with starlight scopes. The gunships, meanwhile, hovered maybe five hundred meters overhead. If through their scopes the snipers saw enemy below, they and the slick's door gunners would take them under fire, with weapons loaded with tracer rounds. This showed the gunships exactly where in the pitch-black night the target was, and in turn, the gunships would hose the area down. The slick could also drop Air Force flares to light up the contact area, and a reaction force was always ready and waiting at the fire base if a target justified "piling on."*
>
> *From the outset, Night Hunter was incredibly successful, with scores of dead VC and no friendly casualties at all . . .*[1]

As a combat leader, you will have to be able to do what Col. Hackworth did: develop new, innovative ways to use your equipment.

Terrain

You can easily see how terrain influences techniques in a broad sense, how techniques in a desert must be different from techniques in a jungle or in alpine mountains in the winter.

But as a junior Marine leader, you need to know the microterrain best. Microterrain is not the terrain on a map, important as that is, but the terrain which you actually see before you. You have to learn to see its military significance in every detail. For example, that bit of woods may enable you to bring a squad up on the enemy's flank undetected. This gully may enable a fire team to get to the top of the hill before the enemy can see it. A very shallow depression over there, just inches deep, may permit a squad to crawl forward safely. The enemy will know your troops are there, but if they low-crawl, he cannot hit them with his direct fire weapons.

As a squad leader or platoon commander, you must develop a fine eye for the details of microterrain. Each slightly different element of terrain permits a different technique. Each technique in turn depends on the right bit of terrain--it won't work without it. Techniques and terrain are married together. You can only be competent at techniques if you can see how techniques and terrain relate.

Tactics

Changes in tactical thought also bring changes in techniques. Tactics are situational: What you decide to do at a specific moment reflects that situation. But specific tactics also reflect broader tactical thought, general concepts of how to fight.

You will remember from the first course of this program, *Tactical Fundamentals*, the discussion of the three generations of warfare. Each generation included certain broad concepts of tactics, of how to fight. For example, in the first generation, warfare of line and column, you attacked either in a line two or three men deep or in a column. Those tactics brought with them certain techniques, such as wheeling the line, deploying from column into line or line into column, etc.

As tactical thought changed with each generation, the techniques also had to change. For example, in non-linear warfare of the third generation--maneuver warfare--you do not fight in rigid lines or columns. An 18th century line or column could not survive on the modern battlefield. Therefore, the techniques of that generation, such as deploying from column into line, are obsolete. When the tactics changed, the techniques also had to change. The old techniques lost their function and meaning.

You can see the influence of tactics on techniques from your own experience. Until recently, the Marine Corps used second generation tactics. In the assault, the object was to close with and destroy the enemy. The technique often used, which you probably have seen, was to form squads, platoons, or even companies "on-line" and attack the enemy position frontally. This brought your riflemen into direct engagement with the enemy's.

But now, Marine Corps tactics have changed to third generation maneuver warfare. In the assault, your objective is not to close with and destroy the enemy, but to get around behind him and collapse him from the rear. Therefore, you do not use the "on-line" assault; it is not a good technique for making a penetration into the enemy's rear. Instead, you use the three-element assault as your technique, where you make a small breach in the enemy's defense, just big enough to pour through into his rear. (See Chapter 4.) The change in techniques is required by the change in tactics.

People

Less obvious sources of change are the nature of your Marines and the nature of the enemy's soldiers. Techniques suitable to troops with enough combat experience to make them wise, but not enough to make them tired or careless, may not work with either green troops or worn-out troops. In addition, techniques that work against one enemy, or even one enemy unit, may not work against another.

During the Burma campaign of World War II, the Japanese infantry developed a very effective technique for the mutual support of riflemen in foxholes. Each foxhole was built behind a log, mound, or other obstacle that provided 100% frontal protection against both small arms fire and observation. Because this protection made it impossible for Japanese riflemen to fire to their front, the foxholes were

sited so that each rifleman's field of fire protected his neighbor (see figure 1-3). In other words, no one was able to protect himself but rather depended on his comrades to cover his front. This technique worked for the Japanese army because its riflemen had a very well developed sense of team-work and self-sacrifice. However, such a technique might not work in forces composed of men from societies that put more emphasis on "looking out for number one."

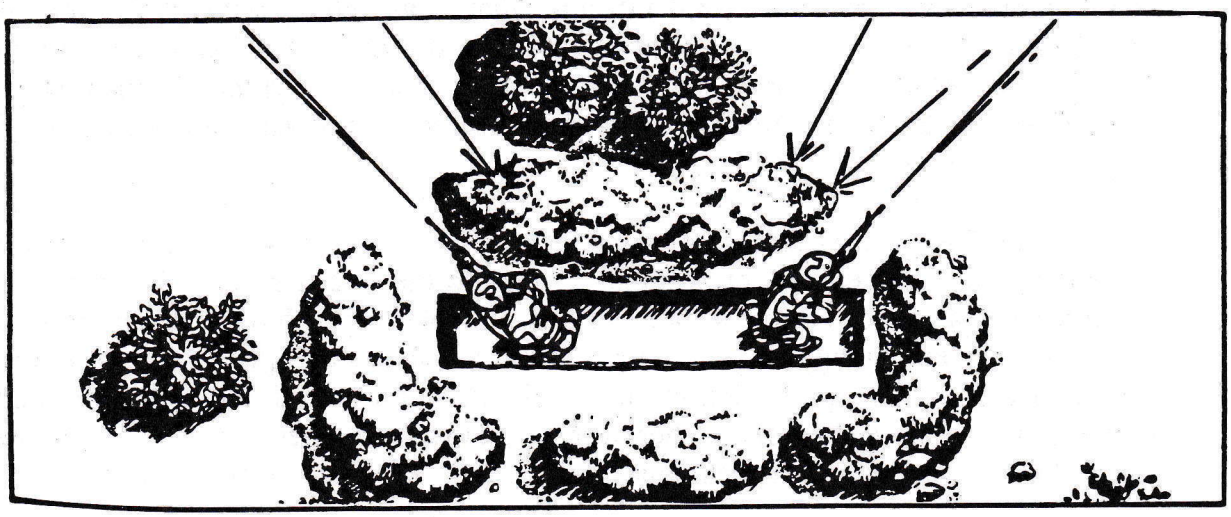


Fig 1-3. Two-man fighting position with protective cover to the front.

The "walking fire" technique--the assault conducted by riflemen and light machinegunners walking towards the enemy in line while they fired from the hip--often brought impressive results against the exhausted Germans of late 1918 and the badly led Italians of 1942. However, the same technique failed miserably against opponents who had the sense to realize that "hip shots" tended to go wide of the mark and then knew how to exploit this discovery.

The Israeli armored corps recently learned a similar lesson. The experience of the 1967 Six Day War had taught the Israelis that Egyptian infantry units would collapse when charged by Israeli tanks. The Israeli tankers thus developed the standing operating procedure (SOP) of immediately assaulting, without fire support, any Egyptian infantry they encountered. However, during the 1973 October War, the Israelis discovered that this habit was very costly against Egyptian infantry which, since 1967, had been well trained in anti-tank techniques and was well equipped with anti-tank weapons.

The most important source of change is the interaction between your forces and the enemy. In every encounter, whether a major battle or a fire-fight, the enemy has a chance to learn about the way that you fight. Similarly, you have a chance to learn about how the enemy fights. In other words, each side has an opportunity to observe the other side's techniques, discover his weaknesses, and develop counter-measures that exploit those weaknesses. Therefore, the advantage goes not to the side that starts the war with the best techniques, but to the side that can best adapt.

DIFFICULTIES IN DEVELOPING TECHNIQUES

Let's suppose you have a thorough knowledge of the factors discussed in this chapter. You know the weapons you will use in combat, how they work and what they can and cannot do. You have a good sense for terrain and know how to use it to your advantage. And you know your Marines, both their strengths and their weaknesses. While all this knowledge is important for developing effective techniques, it is not enough. You must also know the difficulties you will face when you have to put your knowledge into action.

In developing effective techniques through training, you face two main difficulties. First, because of the inherent limitations on training, techniques that work in training

may not work in combat. Second, in developing techniques, there are several pitfalls that Marines often "fall into." Let's look at each difficulty and the problems it can cause.

Training Limitations

You don't prepare for war with live fire free-play exercises. This means that even the best training can only approach, but never equal combat. Training that includes smoke, noise, and confusion is valuable because these are all common on the battlefield. But they still do not add up to real war.

Because even the best training is not the same as combat, you can easily develop techniques that work in training but fail in combat. Sometimes, the problem is purely technical. For example, one of the problems with MILES equipment is that it fails to teach the value of suppressive fire in real combat. The "beep" from your MILES sensor that results from a near miss does not cause you to "hunker down" as a near miss from an enemy machinegun round would. Therefore, in mock combat using MILES equipment, it is difficult to learn effective techniques for suppressing enemy fire while maneuvering.[2] Similarly, indirect fire, especially artillery, plays a minor role in field training exercises. You may develop techniques that work in training exercises only because artillery is not really present. In war, where indirect fire is usually the biggest killer, these techniques may fail.

Since you cannot effectively replicate death and fear of death in training, you may develop techniques that only work where death or fear is not present. For example, in training, you will often see a squad or a platoon assaulting "on-line." If they do that in combat, many of the men in that squad or platoon may die. The survivors will not be very eager to obey the next time someone orders them to assault on-line.

Use your imagination to develop realistic training scenarios that simulate a combat environment. Paint guns and BB guns are only some of the ways units can use to create "battlefield" conditions. While paint pellets and BBs don't kill or injure Marines in training, they do give them a better sense of what it means to be shot at than does blank ammunition. The more you strive for realism, the more useful your training will be, since fear is often a real limitation on the techniques that you can use.

Pitfalls in Developing Techniques

Because developing techniques is a creative activity, a leader can make an infinite number of possible mistakes. In fact, you can be sure that even the best techniques will contain any number of minor errors. But there are four major "pitfalls" that you may fall into when you design techniques. These are the "lockstep" mentality, obsolescence, complexity, and the "patent solution."

The **"lockstep" mentality** creates rigid procedures that interfere with being effective. For example, teaching a Marine that there are three firing positions for the SMAW--standing, sitting, and prone--may undermine rather than help his ability to use the weapon effectively. Marines may take these positions at face value and refuse to use other, more innovative firing positions, such as kneeling behind a wall, resting the SMAW against a support, or sitting in a tree.

Obsolescence is teaching techniques that are out of date. The best example of this is the unnatural fondness that some Marines have for attacking on-line. In an age when the dominant infantry weapon was the rifle, this made a certain amount of sense. The squad was the basic fire unit and needed to advance as a whole if it was to maintain its ability to fire volleys. Although this technique became obsolete with the introduction of light machineguns during World War I, many Marines still insist that their subordinates practice it.

Complexity is developing techniques which are so intricate that they just don't work in combat. The irony here is that it is often far more difficult to devise simple techniques rather than complicated ones. The solution is not to dilute complex techniques but rather to keep searching for techniques that are inherently simple.

"Patent solution" is the search for the technique that will work in every situation. A good example of a "patent solution" was the Japanese banzai attack in World War II. The Japanese tried to use it in every situation, and it usually failed miserably. When they finally stopped using it, on Iwo Jima, they became a much more dangerous opponent.

Think of the techniques you now use. How many of them reflect one or more of these pitfalls? How often do you use an out-of-date technique? How often are your techniques too complex to work even in peacetime? Do you have a "patent solution" that you try to use in all situations, whether it fits the situation or not?

As you can see, pitfalls are varied. All are obstacles in some way to the inherent creativity that you need to develop techniques. Think about the pitfalls as you reflect on how to train your unit.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, you have studied a framework for thinking about and developing techniques. You have learned why techniques are not simply things you memorize in a rigid pattern which is then set for life. Techniques change as weapons and equipment, terrain, tactics, and people change, and most importantly as the enemy changes--as he figures out your techniques and turns them against you or at least renders them ineffective.

You, the Marine leader, need to be more than just a master of current techniques. You must also be an innovator of new techniques. You have learned some things you need to understand in order to create and develop techniques. These are useful tools; now it is up to you to do the job.

If you look back at the history of the Marine Corps and see some of the great junior leaders in our past, sergeants, platoon sergeants, and junior officers, they almost all had something in common, something of which they were very proud. They had a large and varied "bag" of techniques, techniques which they knew and had taught to their men. Whatever the situation, those junior leaders could reach in that bag and pull out something that would work, that would take the enemy by surprise. And they had trained their Marines so that they could execute each and every technique in that bag quickly and flawlessly.

That legacy is their challenge to you, the Marine Corps' junior leaders of today. The next chapter will show you some ways you can begin to measure up to that challenge.

Notes

1. Colonel David H. Hackworth, *About Face*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), p. 679.
2. The inverse of this can also be true. Marines who "game the game" by using smoke, leaves, and grass to provide "cover" against the laser beams in MILES transmitters may be developing dangerously unrealistic combat techniques.

Chapter Exercise

1. What are the three important trends in techniques since the 18th Century?

2. What is the primary driving factor behind these trends?

3. What are the most common things that influence techniques? Give an example for each.

4. Why do some techniques work in training but not in combat?

5. What are the major pitfalls that you may "fall into" when you design techniques?

Exercise Solution

1. The three important trends are:

   a. Techniques have ever-shorter "lives," that is, they change more often, especially in wartime.

   b. Small units, battalion and smaller, must master an ever-increasing range of techniques.

   c. The rank at which new techniques must be developed through innovation becomes more and more junior. (See page 4.)

2. The primary driving factor is the increasing pace of technological change. In the 18th century, a basic battlefield technique might last 100 years or more. By the 19th century, weapons began to change much more rapidly. Consequently, techniques for using weapons also changed more rapidly. This trend continues today.

Second, as new weapons develop, the techniques that a unit must master increase. Compared to the purely rifle-armed company of 1914, the "rifle" company today, with machineguns, mortars, SMAWs, AT-4s, SAWs, and grenade launchers has a vastly wider range of techniques which it must master.

Third, because the range of weapons is now much wider at the small unit level, the rank at which new techniques must be developed through innovation has become much more junior. Since today's squad leader has many types of weapons in his squad--rifles, grenades, grenade launchers and SAWS, among others--he has many opportunities to innovate. (See pages 4-6.)

3. The most common things that influence techniques are:

   Weapons and Equipment. The infantry technique of maneuvering by fire teams is a good example of how introducing a particular type of weapon forces a change in techniques. In World War I, the Spanish Civil War, and World War II, infantry squads that had been trained to move and fight as

indivisible units changed their way of fighting soon after they were equipped with light machineguns. Before the light machinegun, a relatively large number of rifle-armed infantrymen, eight or more, had to provide the "critical mass" of fire needed to suppress an enemy machinegun position. However, small unit leaders soon discovered that a smaller team of two to four men armed with a light machinegun could do the job just as well and provide the enemy with less of a target. That left the squad with enough men to maneuver close enough to wipe out the machinegun position with hand grenades, rockets, and its light machinegun.

Terrain. Microterrain can have a very significant impact on techniques. For example, a bit of woods may enable you to bring a squad up on the enemy's flank undetected. A small gully may enable a fire team to get to the top of the hill before the enemy can see it. A very shallow depression, just inches deep, may permit a squad to crawl forward safely. Small unit leaders must have a keen appreciation for terrain advantages and liabilities.

Tactics. The objective in maneuver warfare tactics is not to "close with and destroy" the enemy's combat units, but to bypass and collapse them from the rear. Therefore, you rarely use the "on-line" assault; instead, you may use the three-element assault as your technique, where you make a small breach in the enemy's defense, just big enough to pour through into his rear. The change in techniques is required by the change in tactics.

People. Techniques depend greatly on the quality of your troops: their level of training, combat experience, morale, and cohesion, to name but a few of these qualities. Because in every encounter, the enemy has a chance to learn about the way you fight, what works against him one time may not work the next. For example, the experience of the 1967 Six Day War had taught the Israelis that Egyptian infantry units would collapse when charged by Israeli tanks. The Israeli tankers thus developed the standing operating procedure (SOP) of immediately assaulting, without fire support, any Egyptian infantry that they encountered. However, during the 1973 October War the Israelis discovered that this habit was very costly against Egyptian infantry which had been well trained in anti-tank techniques and was well equipped with anti-tank weapons. (See pages 6-14.)

4. Two reasons why some techniques work in training but fail in combat are:

First, technical limitations of training equipment may teach unrealistic techniques. For example, one of the problems with MILES equipment is that it is difficult to teach the value of suppressive fire in real combat. The "beep" from your MILES sensor that results from a near miss does not cause you to "hunker down" as a near miss from an enemy machinegun round would. Therefore, in mock combat using MILES equipment, Marines may not learn effective techniques for suppressing enemy fire while maneuvering. Similarly, indirect fire, especially artillery, plays a minor role in field exercises. You may develop techniques that work in field exercises only because artillery is not really present. In war, where indirect fire is usually the biggest killer, these techniques may fail.

Second, since you cannot effectively replicate death and fear of death in training, you may develop techniques that only work where death or fear is not present. For example, in training, you will often see a squad or a platoon assaulting "on-line." If they do that in combat, many of the men in that squad or platoon may die. The survivors will not be very eager to obey the next time someone orders them to assault on-line. (See page 15.)

5. The major "pitfalls" are:

The **lockstep mentality**, which creates rigid procedures that interfere with being effective. For example, teaching a Marine that there are only three firing positions for the SMAW--standing, sitting, and prone--may cause problems in combat. Many Marines may take these three positions at face value and refuse to use other firing positions that may be more suitable, such as kneeling behind a wall, resting the SMAW against a support, or sitting in a tree.

Obsolescence, which teaches techniques that are out of date. The best example of this is the unnatural fondness that some Marines have for attacking on-line.

Complexity, which is developing techniques that are so intricate that they just don't work in combat. Sometimes, you may see an inexperienced

leader ignore the KISS rule and develop an elaborate plan of attack that falls apart on first contact with the enemy!

"Patent solution," which is the search for the technique that will work in every situation. A good example of a "patent solution" was the Japanese banzai attack in World War II. The Japanese tried to use it in every situation, and it usually failed miserably. When they finally stopped using it, on Iwo Jima, they became a much more dangerous opponent. (See pages 16-17.)

CHAPTER 2

COMBAT LEADER TECHNIQUES

INTRODUCTION

In Chapter One, you looked at how techniques are developed. You studied the historical aspects of techniques, factors that influence techniques, and some difficulties that you face in developing techniques. This gave you a useful framework for developing and evaluating the techniques that you will use in combat.

In this chapter, you begin to study the patterns of things which you actually **do** in combat. What are the things you do in combat? You lead, you move, you attack, and you defend. The latter three--moving, attacking, defending--are the subjects of chapters 3, 4, and 5. In this chapter, you will study leadership techniques for you, the combat leader.

What do you, the leader, do in combat? First, you estimate the situation. Based on your estimate, you decide on a course of action and develop a plan. Then, you communicate your plan to subordinates and put your plan into action. This process is a continuous cycle. You make continuous estimates; when necessary, you revise plans or develop new ones; you communicate new plans through fragmentary (FRAG) orders, and you change your actions as the situation changes.[1]

To accomplish these tasks, leaders use a variety of techniques. Your specific techniques will vary according to the situation and the amount of time you need to estimate, plan, and act. For example, in certain situations you often have much time to plan and prepare for a mission. Therefore, you might make a careful, detailed estimate of the situation. To learn more about the enemy's intentions, you might delay deciding on a course of action until the situation becomes clearer. Then, once you've made a decision, you develop a detailed plan and communicate it using a written operation order. Finally, before executing your plan, you rehearse it a number of times. When time is not a critical factor, you can take the opportunity to meticulously plan and prepare for your mission. The Somme offensive in World War I, the island hopping campaign in World War II, and Operation Desert Storm are all examples of operations that provided small unit leaders with time to plan and rehearse their actions.

As a situation becomes more fluid, you must accomplish your tasks much more quickly. You make running mental estimates to keep up with a rapidly changing situation. You make quick decisions and rapidly adjust your plans to stay ahead of the enemy. Because time is important, you use brief frag orders--usually oral, not written--and may have only a short amount of time to prepare or adjust.

The whole process--from a change in the situation to a new course of action--may take only a few minutes. Typically, a situation becomes more fluid as contact with the enemy increases and the need for more rapid action becomes critical.

While you may use different techniques for developing and communicating your plan, the basic patterns for these techniques are the same. For example, to prepare for a raid, you may issue a written operation order, covering the situation and your plan of execution in great detail. When you issue a frag order in the middle of your raid, your description of the situation and the plan of execution may be very short since you have only limited time to pass essential information. Again, the techniques you use in each situation may vary, but the basic pattern of what you do remains the same.

Let's look at each of the leader's tasks and learn the basic patterns in the techniques that he uses to accomplish them. These patterns provide you with a set of "building blocks" that you can use to develop effective techniques of your own.

ESTIMATING THE SITUATION

> *If ignorant both of your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril.*
>
> *When you are ignorant of the enemy but know yourself, your chances of winning or losing are equal.*
>
> *Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril.*
>
> *Know the enemy, know yourself; your victory will never be endangered. Know the ground, know the weather; your victory will then be total.*[2]

Nearly 2,500 years ago Sun Tzu wrote these words to highlight the importance of knowledge on the battlefield. Today, this knowledge is no less important than when Sun Tzu wrote about it in 500 B.C. With a good knowledge of the enemy, yourself, and terrain and weather, you will have the tools necessary to master the modern battlefield. The factors that Sun Tzu considered important for victory are

what form the essence of the estimate of the situation. The element that pulls these independent factors together and gives them meaning is the "mission." The mission serves as the glue that binds all these factors together. It focuses your efforts on the battlefield and on the estimate of the situation. Why is the estimate of the situation important? Because it forms the basis for all your decisions. Before making a tactical decision, develop an estimate of the situation first. Since the situation is constantly changing, your mental estimate is a continuous process based on the **mission** and the factors which Sun Tzu mentioned: the **enemy**, **yourself**, and the **terrain** and **weather**. Let's look at each of these factors and their impact.

The Mission

Because it represents what you are trying to do, the mission is the most important element of the estimate of the situation. The mission given you by your commanding officer is what he wants to accomplish and what he expects you to do to help him accomplish **his** mission. In *Tactical Fundamentals*, you learned that mission orders include the commander's intent (long-term goal) as well as the mission (short-term goal). When conducting your estimate of the situation, you must analyze both the intent **and** the mission given by your senior as well as the intent of the commander two levels above you.

In analyzing your mission you need to look at what the ultimate aims of your commanders are, as expressed in their intent, and how they plan to achieve their goals, as expressed in mission statements and taskings. From this analysis, you should be able to determine what your unit needs to do to accomplish its assigned mission. Often this is broken down into "specified" and "implied" tasks, or, more simply, "things you have been told to do" and "things you feel you need to do" to accomplish your mission.

The key point to remember is that you must successfully translate what your unit has been told to do into your own intent and mission statement so that you can focus your and your unit's efforts toward accomplishing the mission. A few years ago, your mission wouldn't have required much thought. Your mission was simply a task, such as *attack and seize Hill 350* or *seize and occupy BLT Objective A*, etc. You were assigned this task by your senior and didn't question it unless it was unclear or contradictory. Now your mission is usually expressed in broader terms. It tells you *what you must do to the enemy*, not simply what to do. You are expected to use initiative to best decide how to get the result your senior wants. And you

must consider your mission within the framework of your commander's intent, mission, and focus of effort. Sometimes, acting on your own initiative according to the situation, you may change your mission to accomplish your commander's intent. All these considerations weigh heavily on your estimate of the situation, since you are not simply seizing or occupying a piece of ground.

The Enemy

Because your tactics focus on "getting at" the enemy, knowledge of him is a very important consideration in making your decision. You constantly assess his actions and his dispositions to determine what he is trying to do--his intention. You look for opportunities you can exploit and traps he may be drawing you into.

There are a number of ways that you can determine both the enemy's actions and his dispositions. First, you learn about him through your own reconnaissance--what you see, hear, and smell, and what you learn through the eyes, ears, and noses of the Marines under you. These are your most common and often best sources of information, so you must train your Marines to always be on the lookout for any useful clues on where the enemy is or what he might be doing. Remember, **you must always do reconnaissance.**

There are other sources of information. Enemy POWs, and captured documents, the local population, adjacent units and higher headquarters may provide you with valuable knowledge about the enemy. This list is not exhaustive; the more you look for the enemy and what he's up to, the more sources of information you will discover.

As you gain information about the enemy, you need to put yourself in his place --to look at the situation from his viewpoint. If you know your enemy well, looking at the situation from his perspective can help you to predict his actions. Great commanders develop an intuitive ability for doing this. Napoleon once remarked, "At times it seemed like I was commanding both armies!" However, you must be cautious. You can rarely anticipate the enemy's course of action with a high degree of probability, never with certainty. Because the enemy has an independent will, he is always capable of surprising you.

Yourself

You must think about your own dispositions in your estimate of the situation. Consider the condition of your own troops: Are they rested? Are they well-trained? Is morale high? Are they sufficiently well-supplied? You also consider how effectively your unit is deployed. Do you have proper security and flexibility? Do you have a reserve? What type of firepower do you have available? The answers to these and other questions give you an understanding of your own unit's capabilities, something you must constantly be concerned with.

Because combat is competitive by nature, you need to consider how your own disposition relates to the enemy and what he is trying to do. Is your unit in a favorable position relative to the enemy? How do you think the enemy views the condition and disposition of your troops? Can you deceive him and draw him into a trap? You can't simply consider your own situation in a vacuum; you must relate it to the enemy. And you must always remember that just as you are trying to determine his disposition and intentions, he's trying to do the same to you.

Terrain and Weather

It is not enough to base your estimate solely on the relationship between you, your mission, and your enemy. You must also consider how the medium you are fighting in, the terrain and weather, affect the situation.

Since terrain and weather combine in an unlimited number of ways, no two situations are identical. You may encounter terrain that is very similar in two cases, but one small difference in terrain features, such as a small gully that provides an avenue of approach in one case but not the other, may make a big difference. In judging terrain, you, the leader, must become the expert. You must develop the ability to look over terrain and get a sense of what you can, or cannot, do. This takes experience--experience in moving and fighting across all types of terrain. You can also develop a sense of the value of terrain by studying a historical battle and then doing a terrain walk on the battlefield with your subordinates. Because of the wealth of literature on the Civil War, Civil War battlefields are excellent for doing terrain studies, if they are nearby.

When considering terrain, you must decide what is key terrain--terrain whose control gives a marked advantage to the side controlling it (see Chapter 3 in *Tactical Fundamentals*). You must identify terrain that provides speed, secure routes of movement,

and likely ambush locations that you can use or must avoid.

Similarly, weather often has a dramatic effect on the situation. For example, if your forces have air superiority, you may want to wait for clear weather before you attack. If you are a mechanized force, rain may have a tremendous impact on your ability to move cross country, which, in turn, may force you to alter your plans. History is replete with leaders who considered the weather, took a bold risk which paid off, and won a great victory. As with terrain, you must consider weather carefully and learn how to use it to your advantage.

In addition to the four factors that we have already covered, you may also need to think about the amount of time you have available to accomplish your mission; how much distance you have to cover; as well as how much and what type of logistical support you are going to need. All of these factors may not be necessary all of the time. However, any one of them could become critical in the accomplishment of your mission.

At this point you might ask, "*Is there a technique for estimating the situation?*" Many Marines are taught to estimate the situation using the acronym **METT-TSL**, which stands for Mission, Enemy, Terrain and weather, Troops and fire support available, Time, Space, and Logistics. By using this memory device as a guide, you can organize your thoughts more easily and ensure that you consider many critical elements in your estimate of the situation. A point to remember here is that METT-TSL is not a checklist for success nor does every element of it apply to every situation. There are too many things that might affect the situation, yet don't apply in all situations.

METT-TSL, or any other acronym you may want to use, is only a starting point. If used repeatedly, it will allow you to build up to a level of competence and expertise in estimating the situation. With experience, you will develop an intuitive ability to look at a situation, grasp its key elements, and find a reasonable tactical solution.

COMBAT DECISION-MAKING

After you estimate the situation, you must make a decision and come up with a plan. In fact, you should not think of these three actions as separate; they are all

part of a single whole. In your mind, you will consider decisions and plans as you look over the situation. Similarly, as you evaluate decisions and possible plans in your mind, you need to think back to the situation. All three actions blend as your mind runs them forward and backward: situation --> decision --> plan, and plan --> decision --> situation.

Then why is a "decision" considered something separate? It is considered separate to emphasize that at some point, *you must make a decision*. Military history is full of engagements and battles that were lost because the commander did not ever make a decision, not even a bad one. Like a record stuck in a groove, he just kept estimating the situation over and over. Without a decision, he had no plan; without a plan, his unit simply waited for the enemy to do something to them, which invariably he did. And when the enemy acted, the indecisive commander, of course, had no plan to counter the threat.

Being a leader means making decisions! In combat, this is always difficult. Information is missing or confusing, the potential consequences of a wrong decision may be your own death and the destruction of your unit. In making your decision, you ultimately stand alone: You alone bear the responsibility for it, and every one of your Marines knows that. How do you deal with all this? FMFM 1, *Warfighting*, gets at the heart of the answer:

> *. . . since all decisions must be made in the face of uncertainty and since every situation is unique, there is no perfect solution to any battlefield problem. Therefore, we should not agonize over one. The essence of the problem is to select a promising course of action with an acceptable degree of risk, and to do it more quickly than your foe. In this respect, "a good plan violently executed now is better than a perfect plan executed next week."*[3]

The first part of what FMFM 1 recommends, selecting a promising course of action with an acceptable degree of risk, is part of the commander's art. There is no method which you can learn to do this. You can only learn it by actually making military decisions, in free play field exercises, war games, map exercises and the like, and then by critiquing decisions or seeing what they result in. That is why these activities should take a substantial portion of your time.

The second part of the quote from FMFM 1 refers to action: acting quickly--faster than your enemy--and violently. In part, this is what your plan does. It turns your decision into quick, violent action. But it is more than just planning. It is a habit, or better, a discipline. You must train and discipline yourself to decide quickly and act quickly and violently, in every tactical situation you face. There is a natural tendency to do the opposite--to sit around considering this or that, wait for orders, and then see if something turns up. You must discipline yourself to do the opposite, to act fast and hit the enemy violently, to take advantage of the fact that he is probably sitting around trying to decide what to do and when to do it. That way, you impose your will on him, which is what combat is all about.

There are some points you can keep in mind that will help you make decisions and plans First, keep it simple. Combat is unfriendly to delicate, complicated plans. *Simple does not mean dumb*, as in just charging into the enemy's fire. But it does mean a plan that your Marines can understand and that will not fall completely apart the first time something goes wrong--which will definitely happen in combat.

Second, be practical. Don't try to make your unit do something it can't. Don't count on fire support you are unlikely to get. Don't expect a miracle.

Third, don't expect certainty. War is always an uncertain business. Remember, it is no more certain for the enemy than it is for you. As a leader, you are expected to have the moral courage to make decisions in the face of uncertainty.

Fourth, accept risk. If you try to "cover all the bases," you will be weak everywhere and you will fail. You must decide what effort you will count on to win, and put everything you have into it. That means accepting risk elsewhere. Your attempt to go for a win involves risk and, sometimes, failure. If you fail, pick yourself up, re-estimate the situation, and try again.

Finally, always remember **speed**. Speed wins more fire fights and battles than anything else. That means speed in estimating, speed in deciding, speed in executing. War is, above all, time-competitive, and the side that is consistently faster than its enemy usually wins. The worst kind of leadership is the kind that always makes a good decision and has an excellent plan--too late.

These reference points can help you, but they cannot tell you how to make good decisions and plans. Again, that is part of the commander's art, developed by making military decisions and plans over and over again. FMFM 1 puts it well:

> *A military decision is not merely a mathematical computation. Decision-making requires both the intuitive skill to recognize and analyze the essence of a given problem and the creative ability to deliver a practical solution. This ability is the product of experience, education, intelligence, boldness, perception, and character.*[4]

Remember, you can't develop the ability to think through the use of memory devices and checklists alone--these are only tools. You do it through practice--through repeatedly placing subordinates in tactical scenarios and having them estimate their situations, make decisions, and justify their thinking. Then you critique their results. Through experience in map and sand table exercises, terrain walks, and field exercises, your subordinates learn what things to look for in similar situations. They develop military judgment. Methods or techniques are only starting points. They can't replace practice and experience in tactical decision-making exercises.

COMMUNICATING YOUR PLAN

> *In war, leaders of small units are usually no more than one or two jumps ahead of physical and mental exhaustion. In addition, they run a never-ending race against time. In such conditions long, highly involved orders multiply the ever-present chance of misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and plain oversight. Such orders also increase the chance of error on the part of higher commanders. In seeking to work out all details for subordinate units they may . . . forget some essential. By looking too long through a microscope, they may lose sight of the big picture.*[5]

When you make a decision and develop a plan, you need to communicate your plan to subordinates. Communicating well is just as important as the other leader tasks discussed so far. It is the link between your plan for getting at the enemy and effectively putting that plan into action. You may be the most brilliant tactician in the Marine Corps, but if you can't communicate your plan to subordinates, your unit probably won't do what you want it to.

To communicate well, you must do two things: First, you must make it clear to your subordinates what your plan is and what you want them to do. This may seem obvious, but sometimes you will see leaders who give an elaborate, well-rehearsed brief, use a number of fancy techniques, but fail to make clear what they plan to do. When you develop a plan, **you** understand clearly what you want; the challenge is to make sure your subordinates understand it. As you probably know from experience, this isn't always easy.

There are several reasons why your subordinates must clearly understand your plan. One reason is that they will often find themselves in situations that call for a decision, but they can't seek your guidance because either they don't have time or can't communicate with you. If they clearly understand your plan, they will be able to make good decisions and support what you are trying to accomplish. However, if your plan is poorly communicated, chances are that your Marines will make bad decisions, which result in un-focused efforts.

In a force that uses maneuver warfare, clarity is also important because unit leaders at all levels make decisions **simultaneously**. For example, if a Marine regiment is engaged in a tactical battle, decisions are made simultaneously by the regimental commander, each company commander, and every rifleman. The regimental commander decides to commit his reserves against the flanks of an enemy column on the move. One company commander, preparing to engage the screening elements of the same column, decides to dig in on a reverse slope, and slow the column's progress. At the same moment, a rifleman in that company, who is skilled in using terrain, selects a defile to close in on the rear of an enemy machinegun team. Unless leaders at each level clearly understand the intent of the leader at the level above them (and often the leader's intent two levels above them), their decisions are likely to be poor ones.

Clear communication of your intent is important for another reason. In combat, there is often little time for orders to flow downward. You do not get your order much before it is time to move out. You have probably already experienced

this in field exercises; frequently, a squad leader receives an order from his platoon commander and only has a minute or two to issue his own order before moving out. Of course, sometimes this is because of poor planning. When events allow it, you should get your orders to your subordinates in time for them to plan before they must act.

But combat is time competitive. Why? Because in a force that uses maneuver warfare, success depends on **speed**--speed in assessing situations, speed in making decisions, and speed in putting decisions into action. If you can do these things faster than the enemy, you "out-cycle" him and force him to react to you--you have the initiative. So often you will have little time between receiving an order and acting on it. You will both get and give orders like "Get on the truck and follow me," because there is no time for anything more. But there is a great difference between getting that order when you do know the intent and when you do not. If you know what your commander is trying to do, you will see the connection between the intent and the order. You will have an idea **why** you must get on the truck and follow. If you don't have the intent, you won't have any idea what is going on.

To communicate plans in a timely manner, Marine leaders use **combat orders**. There are three basic types of combat orders: **warning orders, operation orders,** and **fragmentary (FRAG) orders.** Let's study each type of order and see what techniques you use to communicate effectively.

Warning Orders

A warning order is just that--a warning from a leader to his unit to begin preparing for action. Timely warning orders are important. When you receive a mission, you want to get your unit's preparations underway as quickly as possible. This saves time, time you might need later. If you don't issue a warning order, your unit sits around "waiting for the word" when it could be putting that time to valuable use.

Warning orders can be very brief or they can become quite detailed. In fluid combat situations, your warning orders will tend to be concise; e.g., "*Gunny, redistribute the ammo and have the platoon commanders meet me at the CP in three minutes.*" However, in situations where time is less critical, they may be more detailed, like the patrol warning order format shown in figure 2-1. How detailed or concise a warning order is depends on the situation.

There are no standard rules for issuing warning orders. Don't be constrained by any format or method. What's key is to provide enough information to get your unit's preparations underway. You may issue only one warning order, or a series of warning orders. Just remember that your goal is to speed things up.

WARNING ORDER

A. SITUATION: _____

B. MISSION: _____

C. GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS:

1. NAME	2. CHAIN OF COMMAND	3. GEN. ORG. (ELEMENTS)	4. SPEC. ORG. (TEAMS)	5. DUTIES	6. ARMS, AMMO, & EQUIP.	7. GEAR COMMON TO ALL	8. TIME SCHEDULE			
							A. WHEN	B. WHAT	C. WHERE	D. WHO
						UTILITIES, UNSTARCHED		DRAW RATIONS		
						SOFT COVERS		DRAW MACHINE GUNS		
						BOOTS		DRAW / TEST COMM. GEAR		
						GLOVES, BLACK		DRAW AMMO & ORDNANCE		
						CAMO PAINT		ISSUE AMMO / TEST FIRE		
						I.D. TAGS, TAPED		FIRE SUPPORT COORD		
						MILITARY I.D. CARD		FORWARD UNIT COORD		
						EQUIPMENT BELT		CHOW		
						BELT SUSPENDERS				
						AMMO POUCHES				
						CANTEEN CUP				
						CANTEEN COVERS				
						FIRST AID POUCH		PATROL ORDER		
						PONCHO				
						NOTEBOOK, PENCIL				
						LAMINATED MAP		INITIAL INSPECTION		
						GREASE PENCIL				
						EXTRA PR SOCKS		REHEARSAL		
						EXTRA SHOELACES				
						COMPASS		FINAL INSPECTION		
						ALICE PACK		T.O.D		
						RIFLE -		T.O.R.		
						CLEANING GEAR		DEBRIEF		

D. SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS:

1. A. AP1, YOU ARE SECOND IN COMMAND AND THEREFORE IN CHARGE AT ANY TIME DURING MY ABSENCE. I WANT YOU TO ASSIST ME AT ALL TIMES THROUGHOUT THE DAY IN ENSURING THAT THE TIME SCHEDULE IS ADHERED TO. YOU WILL SUPERVISE PATROL PREPARATION AND DRAWING OF EQUIPMENT. ENSURE COMPLIANCE OF WARNING ORDER BY ALL MEMBERS.

   B. ELEMENT LEADERS SUPERVISE PREPARATION OF RESPECTIVE ELEMENTS AND REPORT COMPLIANCE TO AP1.

2. SPECIAL PURPOSE TEAMS / KEY INDIVIDUALS _____

Fig 2-1. Patrol Warning Order Format.

Operation Orders

As your unit prepares for action, you develop your plan and issue an operation order to your subordinate leaders. The basic format for an operation order is standard throughout the U. S. military. It is:

SITUATION
MISSION
EXECUTION
ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS
COMMAND AND SIGNAL

At the small unit level, this format is commonly known as the Five Paragraph Operation Order,[6] or "SMEAC" (see figure 2-2). Marine leaders have used this basic format for years, and it has worked in combat. When you have the time, it is a useful format for issuing your orders, particularly when you are going to write them out. However, as the situation becomes more fluid, you may not have the time to issue well written, detailed operation orders. In combat, many small unit leaders are going to issue their operation orders orally. They may not use every paragraph and subparagraph shown in figure 2-2. Does this mean that these are not effective operation orders; or that SMEAC doesn't work? Before you answer, let's first take a look at the operation order and what you are trying to make it do for you.

The operation order is your tool to express to your subordinates what you want them to accomplish. The Five Paragraph Operation Order format--SMEAC--is a tool Marines are taught to use as a guide to organize information. This format is sound because it flows logically:

"Here's what we face (situation)."
"Here's what we have to do (mission)."
"Here's how we're going to do it (plan of execution)."
"Here's how we're going to get what we need (admin and logistics)."
"Here's how we're going to control it (command and signal)."

Remember, it isn't the format that's important, it's the information. Just being able to fill in all the blanks won't make you a successful commander. You have to be able to think; analyze the situation; develop a course of action; and then give

FIVE PARAGRAPH ORDER FORMAT*

I. SITUATION

- **A. Enemy (SALUTE)**
- **B. Friendly**
  - **(1) Higher**
    - **a. Mission**
    - **b. Commander's Intent**
  - **(2) Adjacent**
  - **(3) Supporting**
- **C. Attachments/Detachments**

II. MISSION (5 W's)

III. EXECUTION

- **A. Commander's Intent/Concept of Operations**
  - **(1) Commander's Intent**
  - **(2) Concept of Operations**
    - **a. Scheme of Maneuver**
    - **b. Fire Support Plan**
- **B. Tasks**
- **C. Coordinating Instructions**
- **D. Reserve**

IV. ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS (4 B's)

V. COMMAND AND SIGNAL

- **A. Command Relationships**
- **B. Signals**
- **C. Location**

*** Note: There are a number of variations to this format.**

Fig 2-2 Five Paragraph Order Format

your subordinates the **information** they need to accomplish the mission. Whether you use SMEAC or some other format, the requirement is the same--pass the necessary information to your subordinates in a timely manner.

How do you pass this information? You start by giving a statement of the **situation.** Don't concern yourself with a specific format for stating the situation. The key is to have your subordinates "see" the situation as you do and understand how it impacts on your plan. Often, you see Marines state the situation using the acronyms "SALUTE" and "HAS." You may even develop your own pattern for stating the situation. Whatever you use, make sure you focus on how what you know about both the enemy and your own forces relates to your plan. Again, don't worry about the format; focus on making sure what you say is relevant and flows logically. You will become good at this through practice.

After you have stated the situation, give your **mission** statement. It explains to subordinates what you have to do and how you plan to do it. You will usually derive this from your mission analysis when you do your estimate of the situation.

Next, you will cover your **execution.** This is the key part of your order. Your execution must contain your intent, your concept of operations, your focus of effort, and specific tasking for each subordinate unit. The most important part of an order is your intent. In *Small Unit Tactical Problems*, you learned that your **intent** is your goal--your concept of what you are trying to do **to the enemy.** To develop your intent, you refer to your senior's intent--what he's trying to accomplish--and the specific mission that he assigned you. Within this framework, you look for enemy weaknesses and how you can exploit them. Is he overly cautious and predictable? Is he forced to protect a static installation? Is he impulsive? If so, can you bait him and draw him into a trap? Have you found a gap that you can penetrate? Have you located a command post that's vulnerable to attack? Then, you consider your own forces and how they can best attack these weaknesses. You may decide to move offensively against the enemy or draw him into your defense and then destroy him with a counterattack. However, at the small unit level, you will often have to take action to feel out the enemy before you can identify weaknesses. As one experienced Marine commander has noted, "*At the company level and below, everything is a meeting engagement.*"

While changes in the situation may force you to modify or change your intent, for simplicity and clarity, you should have only **one** intent. The reason for this should be obvious: Your entire command must focus on accomplishing the same thing! However, there may be some circumstances in which your statement of intent to one subordinate might differ slightly from the statement of intent to another. If some slight differences in wording will make the intent clearer, then do it. But remember that your purpose is to make sure all your subordinate leaders know exactly what

you want to do. Generally, you should use the same words to express your statement of intent to all your subordinates.

For your intent to be fully understood, you must work hard at developing a *shared way of thinking* between you and your Marines. A classic example of a leader who succeeded in combat by developing a shared way of thinking among his subordinates was Admiral Horatio Nelson, the hero of the British naval victory at Trafalgar in 1805. Lord Nelson created a *Band of Brothers* by regularly bringing his subordinate captains together and indoctrinating them with what he called the "Nelson Touch." As Dr. Michael A. Palmer explains:

> *At such meetings Nelson indoctrinated his subordinates, reviewing the variations an engagement might take, making clear his intentions in each, as well as his expectations of those he led. At a stroke or touch, Nelson supplied a coherent doctrine that would unite all in battle. Simultaneously, by bringing his subordinates into his confidence, he exercised his own leadership, insuring that he would get the most from all. In this he differed markedly from Rodney, Howe, and Jervis who remained detached from those they led.*
>
> *. . . The keys to Nelson's Touch were neither his tactics nor his appreciation of the poor fighting quality of his enemies, but his belief that the best way to achieve a decisive victory was to bring the enemy as quickly as possible to close battle, and to give to his subordinates a thorough indoctrination before the engagement, and near-complete initiative once it had begun.*[7]

After you have stated your intent, you then give your concept of operations. This represents your plan for accomplishing your mission. This is also where you can identify your focus of effort. You then assign each of your subordinates a mission. As you learned in *Tactical Fundamentals*, the **mission** which you assign each subordinate tells him what you want him to do *to the enemy*. It is his "slice" of the intent: the particular part of the intent you want his unit to achieve. He should also understand **why** his mission is important to achieving the intent. Knowing why, he can fight for a long time without further direction or guidance. This is important, because the chaos of battle often makes communications impossible, at least for a while. When communications break down, unit leaders and individual Marines must continue to act. Knowing why they are doing something helps keep them focused.

Your **focus of effort** is *your bid to act decisively.* It is not simply a unit or a critical enemy weakness, but a **relationship** between the enemy weakness and the unit you choose to act against it. For example, when stating your focus of effort, you might say:

> *"Focus of effort is 2d Platoon's counterattack once we have drawn the enemy across the river."*

This tells all your subordinates both **who** you choose as the focus of effort and **what** that unit is to accomplish. It also identifies who gets priority of fires, logistical support, etc.

As with your statement of the situation, you shouldn't get wrapped up in the semantics of your execution paragraph. The format is not as important as the information you are trying to convey. It is essential that you clearly explain your intent and what you want each subordinate to accomplish (their missions), and identify your focus of effort. In general, you should start by stating your intent, followed by how you see the battle unfolding (concept of operations). Then, you identify your focus of effort and assign each subordinate a mission. As you gain experience issuing orders, your style will develop a pattern that flows logically.

The final elements in the operation order are any special instructions that must be mentioned. This includes any modifications to SOPs, special coordination or control measures, administrative and logistical instructions, and any communications or signalling instructions. In the Five Paragraph Operation Order, these things are covered in the last part of the *Execution* paragraph, and in the *Administration and Logistics* and *Command and Signal* paragraphs. If your unit has effective SOPs, you will find that you can omit many things that you might otherwise want to cover in your order.

How do you issue operation orders? Essentially, there are two ways to issue an order, in writing or orally. A written operation order is what you are most likely to use during operations that allow you time to prepare, such as raids or the start of major offensives. Generally, this type of operation order closely follows the SMEAC format. Often, higher units issue lengthy operation orders. Avoid the temptation to do this at the small unit level. Keep your written orders crisp, short, and to the point. Emphasize the **quality** of the information you are passing, and leave the quantity to higher headquarters.

Oral operation orders are what you are most likely to use in a more fluid, rapidly changing environment. Often times you will issue an oral order when you don't have a lot of time to prepare **your** order, but want to maximize the amount of time your subordinates have to prepare **their** orders. Don't just "fill in the blanks" using SMEAC or some other format. Concentrate on what you are trying to say, not how you are trying to say it. If you begin your oral order by saying, "Paragraph One...Situation...Subparagraph A...Enemy...," you are on the wrong track. Make your information flow smoothly from one point to the next. Stay focused; give your subordinates the information they need to succeed; and keep it brief. Let's look at an example of an oral order that a company commander might issue:

Mechanized enemy forces are advancing south rapidly along Highway 7. I don't know any more than that. Our battalion will block the enemy advance and then counterattack in his left flank to cut him off and encircle him. B Company is located about 3 kilometers west of here and is moving north to encircle the enemy. We are the blocking force. We have to stop the enemy's forward advance in order to allow B Company to counterattack. I intend to stop the enemy's progress at the Mirada Pass and then counterattack locally as he deploys in the La Prensa Valley. Focus of effort is 2d Platoon's counterattack in the valley.

(To 1st Platoon.) *Ambush the enemy, reference the Mirada Pass, to stop his advance and force him to deploy in the La Prensa Valley.*

(To 2d Platoon.) *Position yourself on the left side of Highway 7, north of Mirada Pass. On order, counterattack into the enemy's right flank as he deploys in the La Prensa Valley.*

(To 3d Platoon.) *Support 2d Platoon's counterattack in echelon behind him.*

(To Weapons Platoon.) *You are attached to 2d Platoon to support his counterattack.*

All visual signals and brevity codes are per company SOP. Also, I want the trucks to move 1st Platoon to the Mirada Pass, and then go into reserve behind 3d Platoon to mount them up if 2d Platoon makes a breakthrough. I'll be located with 2d Platoon initially.

** Note how the company commander's order flowed logically from his statement of the situation, through his mission, execution, admin and logistics, and finally to command and signal. Also note that there is no clear distinction between the first few elements of the order. In oral orders, this is usually the rule, not the exception! Don't get wrapped up in trying to distinguish between your mission, your intent, your scheme of maneuver, etc. Just explain what you want to do! Initially, you may have some trouble, but you'll get better with practice.

Though SMEAC is a helpful tool for organizing your information, there are some pitfalls you need to avoid when putting together your operation order. First, if the information you have fits into the format, thats fine. If it doesn't, don't worry about it. It's the information that's important, not the format.

Second, avoid the tendency to cover every detail in your order. Your order should only cover what is vital to the mission, and nothing more. Long, detailed operation orders are a burden to you and your subordinates. If you find yourself covering things like immediate action procedures or movements through danger areas, you may need to look at how you have trained your unit. Well trained units with solid SOPs won't need a lot of details in their operation orders. Tell them what they need to know to accomplish the mission. They will know what to do.

Third, don't spend too much time trying to write the "ultimate" operation order. If you find that you take a lot of time to write an order, you are probably putting in too much detail, or you are concentrating too much on the format instead of the information. Think about what your subordinates need to know to accomplish the mission--then tell them!

Frag Orders

To modify existing orders, you issue a frag order. Frag orders are the rule in fluid situations. Issuing a frag order is your means of influencing the battle once it begins. You issue frag orders to commit your reserve, modify your intent, shift your focus of effort, or effect some other appropriate action. Because you will seldom anticipate the exact course of a battle or engagement, you will almost always need to issue frag orders to take advantage of fleeting opportunities or deal with unexpected enemy threats. However, once you commit your unit to action, you lose much control. When you make contact with the enemy, you may find that you can direct only a small part of your unit. Therefore, it's critical that you position yourself where you can influence the **decisive** part of the battle. Often, but not always, you should locate yourself with your focus of effort. With experience, you learn how best to do this.

Frag orders should generally follow the same basic pattern as operation orders. Because the situation changes rapidly in fluid warfare, your frag orders must be **clear** and **concise**. However, the most difficult aspect of issuing frag orders is not necessarily deciding **what** to do but figuring out **when** the situation calls for an order. As Adolf von Schell noted in *Battle Leadership*:

> *. . . our map problems generally close with a statement that it is now such and such an hour and call for a decision. We know, therefore, that the situation is such and such, that we have all the information we are going to get and that we must make a decision. . . . one of the most difficult things we have to do in war is to recognize the moment for making a decision. The information comes in by degrees. We never know but that the next minute will bring us further information that is fresh and vital. Shall we make a decision now or shall we wait a little longer? It is usually more difficult to determine the moment for making a decision than it is to formulate the decision itself.* [9]

Aids to Effective Communications

There are a number of techniques that can help you communicate effectively. Perhaps the best is to take your subordinate leaders on reconnaissance. You may find a vantage point that overlooks your entire route of movement, which allows you to point out important terrain features as you issue your order. Or you might crawl up to a berm and point out key features in the enemy position that you plan to assault. When time allows, any type of reconnaissance over ground which you'll be moving across or defending helps.

Another good technique is to use a terrain model as you issue your operation order. By using a terrain model, you can point out key features as you identify them. Some leaders have subordinates build elaborate models, but even a simple model using a helmet, twigs, and some pine cones will help. Even if you don't have time to set up a terrain model, you should at least use a map, photo, or diagram to help orient subordinates as you talk.

These are not the only techniques that help you communicate effectively. You're limited only by your own creativity. You will develop some techniques "on the spot" as you gain experience working with your subordinates.

Summary

When you issue an order to your subordinates, your responsibility is to make sure that your order is perfectly clear. When there is room for doubt, you should question your subordinates to make sure they understand. Of course, each subordinate must do everything in his power to make sure he understands what you want him to do. He should ask questions if there's any doubt. But the burden rests with you to make sure the order is clear and that it is understood. This is **your** responsibility.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, you have studied the things that you, the leader, do in combat. You continually estimate your situation, make decisions and develop plans, and put your plans into action by issuing orders. In short, you think, decide, and act. You could rightly argue that in modern combat, **all** Marines do these things. But what sets the leader apart is that he does these things not only for himself but also for the unit. As both the coach and the quarterback, he fights the team. In combat, everything starts with him, so unless his estimates, decisions, plans, and orders are sound, the unit probably won't succeed. For this reason, the leader bears a tremendous responsibility.

In studying how the leader estimates his situation, makes decisions, and devises plans, you learned that these **are not** distinct and orderly actions in a set process. All three actions blend together as part of a single whole. Memory devices and aids are only a starting point for you. Through experience with sand table and map exercises, war games, and field exercises, you learn to do them **intuitively**.

To communicate plans, Marine small unit leaders issue three types of orders: warning orders, operation orders, and frag orders. You learned that the most important aspect of your order is the information it contains, not the format it is in.

Ultimately, two things determine how well you communicate orders. First, **you must practice**. At the small unit level in combat, you seldom have time to write an order and read it to subordinates. In most cases, you will have to think, decide, and act quickly and resolutely. You will make instantaneous estimates, quick decisions, and issue oral orders on the spot. To communicate well, you must practice issuing orders until they become second nature. Don't worry about the exact format; as you practice, you will develop a familiar pattern that flows logically.

Second, **your style must be uniquely yours**. Every leader has his own unique style for communicating orders. While it's acceptable to borrow useful techniques from other leaders, don't try to mold yourself entirely to their style. Instead, you must create a style that is yours, one that fits your situation and works best for **you**.

The one theme that runs consistently throughout this chapter is that doing all these things well takes **practice.** In combat, you can't rely on a rigid set of rules to make decisions, nor can you pull out an "idiot card" and read from a checklist to communicate orders. That's what an amateur does. Instead, the professional learns through experience to recognize the key aspects of a situation and makes a timely decision based on sound, logical reasoning. Then, he communicates his decision in a clear, concise order using a technique that was developed through much practice. And he develops these abilities in his subordinates because they must be similarly skilled if the unit is to be a truly professional one. In that sense, leader techniques are the starting point for all combat techniques.

Notes

1. This process is analogous to the Boyd Cycle (or OODA Loop) which was described in MCI 7401 *Tactical Fundamentals*.
2. Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971) p. 84 & 129.
3. FMFM 1 *Warfighting*, p. 70.
4. FMFM 1 *Warfighting*, p. 69.
5. *Infantry in Battle*, (Washington, D. C.: The Infantry Journal, Incorporated, 1939), p. 161.
6. The Five Paragraph Order was developed by Major Eben Swift, USA, at Ft Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1894. See *The Leavenworth Schools and the Old Army*, by Timothy K. Nenninger, p. 46.
7. Dr. Michael A. Palmer, *Lord Nelson: Master of Command*, (*Naval War College Review*, Winter, 1988), pp. 110-111.
8. Adolf von Schell, *Battle Leadership*, (Quantico: The Marine Corps Association, 1982), p. 55.

Chapter Exercise

1. What elements do you need to consider when you make your estimate of the situation?

2. What are some points you can keep in mind to help you make decisions and plans?

3. When making decisions in combat, should you wait for "perfect" intelligence? Why or why not?

4. What is a warning order? What is it for?

5. What is SMEAC? What does it help you do?

6. What are some pitfalls you need to avoid when putting together your operation order?

Exercise Solution

1. When making your estimate of the situation you need to consider the following factors:

a. Mission
b. Enemy
c. Terrain and Weather
d. Troops and Fire Support
e. Time
f. Space
g. Logistics

Together, these factors form the acronym METT-TSL, which you can use as a memory device to guide you in organizing your thoughts. Remember, METT-TSL is not a checklist for success nor is every element of it applicable to every situation. With experience, you will develop an intuitive ability to look at a situation, grasp its key elements, and find a reasonable tactical solution. (See pages 29-33)

2. First, keep it simple. Combat is unfriendly to delicate, complicated plans. *Simple does not mean dumb*, as in just charging into the enemy's fire. But it does mean a plan that your Marines can understand and that will not fall completely apart the first time something goes wrong, which will definitely happen in combat.

Second, be practical. Don't try to make your unit do something it can't. Don't count on fire support you are unlikely to get. Don't expect a miracle.

Third, don't expect certainty. War is always an uncertain business. Remember, it is no more certain for the enemy than it is for you. As a leader, you are expected to have the moral courage to make decisions in the face of uncertainty.

Fourth, accept risk. If you try to "cover all the bases," you will be weak everywhere and you will fail. You must decide what effort you will count on to win, and put everything you have into it. That means accepting risk elsewhere. Your attempt to go for a win involves risk and, sometimes, failure. If you fail, pick yourself up, re-estimate the situation, and try again.

Finally, and always, remember **speed.** Speed wins more fire fights and battles than anything else. That means speed in estimating, speed in deciding, speed in executing. War is above all time competitive, and the side that is consistently faster than its enemy usually wins. The worst kind of leadership is the kind that always makes a good decision and has an excellent plan--too late. (See page 35)

3. No. In combat, you will never have perfect intelligence. The fog of battle is always present to some degree. The key is to select a promising course of action with an acceptable degree of risk, and to do it more quickly than your foe. In this respect, "a good plan violently executed now is better than a perfect plan executed next week." (See pages 34-37.)

4. A warning order is just that--a warning from a leader to his unit to begin preparing for action. You issue a warning order to get your unit's preparations underway as quickly as possible. This saves time--time that you might need later. If you don't issue a warning order, your unit sits around "waiting for the word" when it could be putting that time to valuable use. (See page 39.)

5. SMEAC represents the basic format for the Five Paragragh Order. The acronym stands for:

SITUATION
MISSION
EXECUTION
ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS
COMMAND AND SIGNAL

SMEAC is the tool you use to organize your information into a combat order. Remember, the important point here is that it is the **information** that is important, not the format. Use the format to make your information flow smoothly and logically but don't be overly concerned about format. Make SMEAC work for you--don't you work for SMEAC. (See pages 40-41)

6. Though SMEAC is a helpful tool for organizing your information, there are some pitfalls you need to avoid when putting together your operation order. First, if the information you have fits into the format, fine. If it doesn't, don't worry about it. Its the information that's important, not the format.

Second, avoid the tendency to cover every detail in your order. Your order should only cover what is vital to the mission, and nothing more. Long, detail laden operation orders are a burden to you and your subordinates. If you find yourself covering things like immediate action procedures or movements through danger areas you may need to look at how you have trained your unit. Well trained units with solid SOPs won't need a lot of details in their operation orders. Tell them what they need to know to accomplish the mission. They will know what to do.

Third, don't spend too much time trying to write the "ultimate" operation order. If you find that you take a lot of time to write an order, you are probably putting in too much detail, or you are concentrating too much on the format instead of the information. Think about what your subordinates need to know to accomplish the mission--then tell them! (See page 46)

CHAPTER 3

SMALL UNIT MOVEMENT TECHNIQUES

INTRODUCTION

In the last chapter, you looked at some techniques for leading in combat. In this and the following chapters, you will look at some techniques for doing what your **unit** must do: move, attack, and defend. Because these are techniques which your whole unit must know, you should share the techniques that you learn in this course with the other Marines in your unit. That includes sharing the concepts and reasoning behind them--the "why"--as well as the techniques themselves.

BASIC CONCEPTS

In combat, effective movement techniques have three basic requirements: **speed**, **security**, and **control**. Let's look at the concepts behind these requirements and see how they interrelate.

Speed of movement is a basic requirement. Your speed is going to be measured in relation to your opponent's speed. If you are to out-maneuver your enemy, you must be able to move faster than he can. Speed in this context includes *speed over distance*. If you can move fast, but only keep it up for a kilometer or two, your movement techniques are not adequate. Your enemy will regain his balance when you have to slow down.

Security is another basic requirement when moving. How do you gain security? First, you gain security through **stealth**. In combat, you will often stay alive through not being seen or heard by your enemy. You will often defeat your enemy through stealth, because you will sneak up on him, infiltrate through him, get behind him and ambush him as he falls back. To do any of these things, you must be able to move unseen and unheard. You and your Marines must be good hunters, who can stalk your enemy as you might stalk a deer.

Second, you gain security through **protection**. You protect your unit in a number of ways: first, by giving it warning, through having scouts out front and Marines watching your flanks. Only rarely should you move without some form of frontal, flank, or rear security. That is why you have someone "on point:" to provide warning.[1]

Second, you protect your unit by positioning your key weapons where they can quickly gain fire superiority if you make contact with the enemy. For example, you

may have a SAW near the front of your unit so that it can quickly provide protective fires if you meet the enemy. You may have M-203s or SAWs on your flanks, so they can immediately suppress any enemy they encounter. In some situations, you may position your machineguns where they can overwatch your movement across an area. All your Marines must constantly think about immediately gaining fire superiority if you encounter the enemy. Whoever gains fire superiority can keep moving; whoever loses it must stop.

Third, planning and calling for fire support is an effective, battle-tested means for protecting your unit. If you are a squad leader, you should always have a plan in your head for getting support from the company mortars. If you are a company commander, you should do the same with your forward observer (FO) and forward air controller (FAC). This is why you want to have an FO or FAC with you on a patrol: In a pinch, they can get fire support quickly by thinking ahead and planning targets on likely ambush sites along your movement route. However, keep in mind that every one needs to be able to call for supporting arms. Not every unit is going to have an FO or FAC, and not every FO or FAC is going to survive contact with the enemy.

The key for protection is to *think ahead at all times*. It is similar to defensive driving on the freeway; you want to look beyond the car just in front of you, to be prepared for what might happen further down the road. You don't want to be caught daydreaming and have to react at the last second.

Speed and security relate to each other in several ways. Often, *speed provides security*. Frequently, if you are moving fast, your enemy does not have time to react effectively against you. This is especially true if you are one among many friendly units that are moving fast. Then, the enemy faces multiple threats that overload his ability to react effectively.

On the other hand, speed and security are sometimes in conflict. For example, speed may sacrifice stealth, and stealth may sacrifice speed. Both are means for hitting the enemy unexpectedly; which one is best depends on the situation--something that you, the leader, must judge. Speed may also make it difficult to plan protective fires; for example, the over-watch technique--where part of your unit is moving while the other part is in position to provide protective fire (also called movement by bounds)--slows you down. Again, deciding which technique is right for the situation calls upon your military judgment.

Control is another concept that is important in moving. If you do not have control, your men will either bunch up or get lost. How do you get control? One way to get control is through formations, where you tell people where to be in relation to each other. For example, in the squad wedge formation, each fire team is aligned in relation to its neighbor. Formations allow you to control your unit during movement based upon the situation. You want to ensure that your formations are rigid enough to allow effective control of your unit, yet flexible enough to allow you to make good use of terrain. Standard formations, such as the wedge, column, echelon, or skirmishers, are not the only types of formations you can use. In some situations you may have very loose formations with little form. In other situations you may develop some formations of your own. Don't feel limited--be innovative. Not every standard formation is going to be appropriate for every situation you encounter in combat.

These concepts--speed, security, and control--guide how you move in a combat zone. How they relate to each other depends on the situation. In one situation, speed may be dominant; in a second, security; and in a third, such as a night attack, control. Which dominates in a specific situation you must judge. Like so much in war, you cannot do this by formula.

MOVING NOT UNDER FIRE

Moving in a combat zone, you may be under fire or not under fire. Of course, when you are moving and not under fire, you must be prepared at every moment for taking fire. As you move, you must be constantly on the lookout for cover. Never get your unit into a position where you are caught without cover nearby. You must always anticipate contact; the enemy will try to take you unaware, just as you are trying to do the same to him. Sometimes, he will succeed. You may find yourself under fire with frightening suddenness. Therefore, all techniques for moving not-under-fire must be suitable for immediate combat.

When not under fire, squads generally move in column--single, double, or triple --or as skirmishers. Which technique is appropriate depends on the terrain and the enemy situation.

Movement in Column

Columns permit you to move rapidly on roads, trails, in mountain defiles, and through heavy vegetation. Generally, you will use a column when the enemy situation is such that your Marines do not need to be dispersed laterally. Moving in column often enhances speed, especially in vegetated or broken terrain.

Whether the column should be single, double, or triple will be based on such factors as the vegetation, width of the trail, and the degree of dispersion required by the enemy situation. Security is important whenever you move in column. Remember, the enemy may hit you unexpectedly, and your own flank or point may provide your only warning. If they cannot, because of terrain, weather, or anything else, the column is risky.

Movement as Skirmishers

If the column is too risky for the situation, you may form your unit as skirmishers. Skirmishers spread out laterally but stagger themselves to avoid direct alignment either laterally or in depth. There are two main reasons for this: First, they stagger themselves to prevent one Marine from masking another's fire. Therefore, the distance and relative positions will be governed by the types of weapons carried as well as by terrain and expectations about the enemy.

Second, staggering also makes Marines less vulnerable and units less definable as targets, which contributes to security. Because they are dispersed laterally over a wide area and staggered, Marines formed as skirmishers are sometimes a good option for crossing open areas.

Squad leaders position themselves wherever they can best lead in the specific situation. This is usually toward the front, sometimes even at the point, for positive leadership and to best understand the situation.

In close terrain where encounters with the enemy are likely to occur suddenly, the squad leader may direct his men to initiate an attack on their own. For example, he may say, "*If you see an enemy within 50 meters, attack immediately.*" Or, he may say that he will initiate the attack on his own signal.

Overwatch Techniques

The immediate transition from movement not under fire into contact with the enemy is a critical moment for any unit. You can smooth that difficult transition in situations where contact seems likely by using two techniques: travelling overwatch and bounding overwatch.

In **travelling overwatch**, everyone keeps moving, but some Marines are positioned to provide fire support with their weapons to those in the lead. In **bounding overwatch**, only part of your unit keeps moving, while those halted take positions to provide covering fire to those moving. Then, the Marines in the lead halt and provide cover while the rest of the unit moves up. You "leap frog" your Marines forward by either **successive** bounds or **alternate** bounds. These techniques help you transition quickly and smoothly into contact, since part of your unit is instantly ready to open fire.

As you move, regardless of the formation, there are several things you should always keep in mind. Several of them have already been discussed. You should always anticipate enemy contact and think about where your men can take cover. You should always look for likely enemy ambush sites and target them. You should anticipate running into obstacles and danger areas along your route and plan in advance how you will deal with them. All these measures provide **security** to your unit--something that must be constant, all-around, and never-ending. And you must establish this same concern among your subordinates because the moment you let your guard down is probably when the enemy will surprise you.

Crossing Danger Areas

Danger areas are places where you are likely to be ambushed. Some typical danger areas are: open areas, road and trail intersections, small villages, streams and rivers, and bridges.

In crossing danger areas, the first thing you should do is to try to view it from the enemy's perspective. What opportunities does it give him? How would you set up there if you were the enemy? Then, if you can, avoid the danger area. That is especially true of open areas where you can be seen for some distance. If you cannot avoid an open area, in general you should do the following:

--First, recon the area as much as time and the need for speed permit. Ideally, you should recon it before your whole unit gets there.

--Second, find the best place to cross it. "Best" usually means the place where you will be least observed and least exposed to fire.

--Third, designate near and far side rallying points in case your unit gets scattered. Make sure everyone knows where they are.

--Fourth, decide how best to provide security. You may want to move fast, deployed as skirmishers, with some Marines such as SAW gunners in over-watch. Or you might recon the far side and the flanks to make sure the enemy's not lying in ambush. The choice is situational, based on the time you have available and the likelihood of enemy contact.

--Finally, once you are through the open area, regroup quickly, count noses, and keep going.

This sequence is only a starting point; your unit will develop its own SOP as you practice crossing danger areas during training exercises. In well-trained units, Marines do these things quickly and automatically without waiting for instructions.[2]

Obstacles

Another thing that you have to think about while moving is obstacles. Obstacles slow you down or restrict movement. They may be natural, such as rivers, cliffs, or a patch of thick vegetation, or they may be man-made, such as barbed wire or ditches.

Obstacles endanger you in several ways. They can slow down or stop your movement, endangering your mission. They can cause you to become visible or to bunch up. The best way to deal with an obstacle is to find out about it before you are on top of it so that you can plan. This is especially important because the enemy will probably cover the obstacle with fire. You should have unit SOPs for

dealing with obstacles commonly encountered such as barbed wire.

One of the most important things you have to think about are mines and booby traps. These may cause the greatest number of casualties among your Marines. Every Marine in your unit must be trained to look for them. They could become the enemy's most effective weapon.

Colonel Hackworth writes about booby traps based on his experience as a battalion commander in Vietnam:

> *Booby traps were responsible for many, many casualties in the 1/327 (1st Battalion, 327th Infantry) during this period. The enemy had an incredible array of the things, which they attached to the doorways of vacant houses and shrines, on gates, and especially along the tops of paddy walls. There were hand-grenade booby traps with one or multiple trip wires secured to trees and rocks. There were more grenades, pins removed, held tight by a bag of rice, a rock, or a potential souvenir (a VC flag, for example), that were activated simply by picking up the item under which the primed grenade lay. Some of the best VC booby traps were made in the U.S.A.: Air Force "dud" cluster bomblets, modified with a pressure device and buried just below ground level to blow when a trooper stepped on them, or 81-mm and 60-mm dud mortar rounds, buried "nose up" and similarly pressure detonated. The VC used anything careless American soldiers left behind (C-ration cans, for example, formed the basis of many lethal enemy devices); deadlier still were the items the VC gave back from time to time, like U.S. grenades they policed up on the battlefield. A less-than-savvy American trooper might pick up one of these seemingly abandoned grenades and add it to his kit; during a fight days or weeks later he might use it and find himself dead the second he pulled the pin: the VC who'd found it first had replaced it on the battlefield only after removing the delay.*[3]

The most important thing is to train your unit **now** to be conscious of the mine and booby trap threat. In peacetime, such training is often neglected or poorly done, amounting to little more than some lectures from which little is remembered. Colonel Hackworth writes of a common problem in describing the Army's training during the Vietnam War:

> *With mines and booby traps responsible for probably 50 percent of all U.S. casualties in Vietnam, one would have thought mines and booby-trap training would be a top priority in the Vietnam-oriented AIT (Advanced Infantry Training)--maybe thirty hour's minimum, with the subject integrated into every other aspect of the training. On the contrary, exactly **five hours** of the entire nine-week course were devoted to these lethal devices: four hours on booby traps, which barely scratched the "need to know" surface for the soldiers who would confront them daily in Vietnam, and one hour on mines, and on the World War II M-21 **antitank** mine at that. It was unbelievable. Three years after the first U.S. doughboys learned about these devices the hard way, there wasn't even a Vietnam-oriented mines and booby-trap training film. There was no decent mines and booby trap training aid, something like what I'd heard the Marine Corps had developed, a device that when "exploded" propelled a red substance that clung to the trainee like blood.*[4]

Colonel Hackworth's comments contain two useful recommendations for training your unit to deal with mines and booby traps. First, get some simulators. You will probably have to make them yourself. Use your own ingenuity to come up with simulators that make a noise and mark the man. Then, integrate them into every aspect of your training. Your goal is to create a mind-set among your Marines that makes them **always** look for mines and booby-traps, **always** suspect that something that appears perfectly innocent may be one. You cannot do that just by holding "blocks of instruction" on mines and booby-traps. Instead, they must be everywhere, whenever you are training. That is one of the best things you can do for your Marines, because it will teach them to be on the lookout for the weapon that is most likely to kill or injure them in a real war, especially in low intensity conflicts.

Unit SOPs

Finally, a useful technique for movement not under fire is to develop unit SOPs. SOPs are useful in two kinds of situations: those which are always essentially the same, and those where you will have no time to think and must react instantly. Examples of the first include moving on trucks and breaching wire obstacles. Your unit may develop SOPs for both, e.g., a standard way of positioning your Marines in the truck bed, or having set jobs for every Marine in your unit when you encounter wire. An example of an SOP for situations where you will have no time to think out a solution is an ambush SOP. An ambush is a major danger when you are moving. You will have no time to think when you are caught in one. You need a unit SOP that tells everyone what to do if you get ambushed.

In Vietnam, one army special forces team had the following SOP for breaking out of an enemy encirclement:

a. The team forms into position (pyramid configuration with the base of the pyramid leading.)

b. CS rounds from M-79s and/or fragmentation grenades are fired or thrown to the flanks.

c. WP grenades are thrown to the rear.

d. A claymore mine and/or fragmentation grenades are fired or thrown in the direction the team will move.

e. Immediately after the claymore and/or grenades go off to the front, the team moves out.

f. The first element of line will fire on full automatic. The others hold fire.

g. When the first element's magazines are empty, the second element moves through them and continues the fire.

h. By the time the second element has emptied its magazines the first element will have reloaded and will pass through them, taking up the assault but will fire on semi-automatic.

i. Once the team starts to move, it must move rapidly, but not run, and never stop until completely out of the encirclement.[5]

You may learn SOPs for both types of situations--those that are always essentially the same, and those where you will have no time to think--in Marine Corps schools, from your reading of military history, from other units, or from your own experience. But don't wait for someone else to teach them to you. You should aggressively seek to find or develop them for your own unit.

In all aspects of moving while not under fire--the basic techniques of moving in columns or as skirmishers, using over-watch, dealing with danger areas, obstacles, mines and booby traps, and using SOPs--there is one thing to keep in mind above all others: You may suddenly find yourself under fire. Everything you do must be done with that possibility always in mind. The unit that wanders carelessly down the road as if walking to the mess hall is the unit that is suddenly wiped out. The unit that can transition smoothly and quickly from moving while not under fire to moving under fire is the unit that survives and accomplishes its mission. The next section discusses techniques for moving under fire.

MOVING UNDER FIRE

Fire without movement is indecisive. Exposed movement without fire is disastrous. There must be effective fire combined with skillful movement.[6]

These words begin the chapter on "Fire and Movement" in *Infantry in Battle*. They sum up the essence of moving under fire.

To move in the face of the enemy's fire, you must first make his fire ineffective. If you do not, you will take heavy losses, and your movement will stop. In *Stormtroop Tactics*, Captain Bruce Gudmundsson writes of an attempt of the German

Imperial Guard to move in the face of British fire in 1914 without first countering that fire:

> *Shortly before 10 A.M., the Guard regiments deployed . . . and began to move forward. British artillery, rifle fire, and, in a few places, machinegun fire, tore gaps in the advancing ranks. Seemingly indifferent to the killing around them, the Guardsmen reformed their lines and continued their advance up the gently sloping meadows that gave the British riflemen such excellent fields of fire. One hundred meters from the British trenches the attack started to fall apart. At 50 meters, the thick skirmish lines had been reduced to groups of 20 or 30 men following whatever officer remained alive . . . While the experience of the young reserve lieutenant who rushed alone into an English position shouting orders at a company that no longer existed was a unique one, the killing and wounding of so many of the Germans through rifle fire made it possible for the British to speedily eject the survivors from the woods and villages and recover most of their original line . . . The 2nd Guard Grenadier Regiment . . . lost 15 officers and 500 men. The 1st Foot Guard Regiment, with an officer roster that read like a "Who's Who" of the Prussian aristocracy, lost eight officers, most of whom were company or battalion commanders, and 800 men.*[7]

Moving successfully in the face of enemy fire requires four actions. First, you must achieve fire superiority. Fire superiority is a partly physical, partly psychological thing. It means that the enemy fears your fire more than he has confidence in his own. That domination of fear over confidence makes him stop moving and shooting. Enemy soldiers keep their heads down and either stop firing or fire inaccurately. The best way to get fire superiority is to engage the enemy with fire as soon as you encounter him, so he perceives that the volume of fire coming in on him is much higher than the volume of fire he is putting out. As Lt Erwin Rommel learned during World War I:

A few shots quickly decided the battle in the forest nursery between the advance guard and the Rumanian scout squad. At such times it is important to move toward the enemy with weapons at the ready (safety off, light machineguns carried in position for shooting.) For he wins who fires first and can deliver the heaviest fire. [8]

Second, you must convert general fire superiority into effective suppression of enemy weapons that cover the route you want to follow. Suppression clears that route of enemy fire. It requires killing, incapacitating, or keeping down the heads of the enemy soldiers manning those weapons. It is a focused, more intense version of your general fire superiority, which you must maintain as you suppress along one particular axis. Suppression may not be complete, but it must be sufficient to permit you to move without taking crippling casualties. Lt Rommel continues:

The night attack on Gagesti by moonlight over the snow was from two directions with strong fire support by the heavy machine-gun platoon. Even after the successful attack this platoon supported the advance in the long village by indirect fire delivered over the tops of the houses. There was little to be hit, of course, but the psychological effect on the enemy within the warm quarters was so great that he allowed himself to be captured without offering much resistance. There were no losses on our side in the fighting at Gagesti.[9]

Third, you must move. Generally, your objective will be to move around or through the enemy so as to get behind him (this will be discussed further in the next section on the attack). Your suppression lets you do this. The other main tools are:

–Microterrain. Small folds in the terrain may give you concealment or cover. Concealment is where the enemy cannot see you. Cover is where he cannot hit you, at least with direct fire weapons. Very small terrain features may give you cover; a depression in the ground only twelve inches deep may allow you to go through or around the enemy without him

being able to hit you with rifle or machinegun fire. It is vital that all your Marines have a keen sense for these microterrain features. They often make the difference between being able to move or not being able to move in the face of enemy fire.

--Concealment through vegetation, weather, fog or night. Like microterrain, these are natural features for which you must have a strong sense. They offer good opportunities for movement that avoids enemy fire.

--Concealment through your own measures, such as use of smoke or camouflage. When nature does not offer concealment, you may be able to create your own.

These movement tools are usually used in combination with suppressive fire. How much you can use microterrain or natural or man-made concealment and how much you must depend on suppressing the enemy depends on the situation.

Finally, once you have gotten through or around the enemy so that his fire no longer threatens you, you must keep moving. There is a tendency at that point to sit down and consolidate. Sometimes the condition of your men may compel that. But it should be avoided as much as possible. Remember, you are moving because your mission requires it; if you stop, you are getting side-tracked from your mission. Also, continued movement is important for your security. If you keep moving, other enemy units "moving toward the sound of the guns" will arrive after you have gone. If you stop, you may find yourself having to fight through another enemy unit before you can resume your mission. Again, speed of movement brings security in many situations.

CONCLUSION

All the techniques discussed in this chapter relate to the three basic concepts that guide movement in a combat zone: speed, security and control. These concepts shape your movement whether it is movement not under fire or movement under fire. You may want to go back through the text again and see how the concepts relate to the techniques.

The concepts are important because of what this course has stressed from the outset: In modern warfare, specific techniques may have only a short life. That means you must not only know techniques, you must be able to invent them. You must be able to devise new techniques when the old ones lose their effectiveness because the enemy has adjusted to them. The basis for being able to invent new techniques is a good understanding of the concepts. The concepts tell you what you must be able to do. You must be able to move fast, with security, and maintain control at the same time. If you keep these concepts in mind, you will probably be able to invent techniques that help you achieve speed, security, and control. Not only is it appropriate for you to invent your own techniques that reflect these concepts, it is **necessary** that you do so.

Notes

1. Larger units protect themselves by deploying a subordinate unit as a **screen.** In general, there are two kinds of screens: **reconnaissance screens** and **security screens.** A reconnaissance screen orients on the enemy. It searches for enemy strengths and weaknesses and guides follow-on forces around or through them. A security screen orients on the force that it is protecting. It serves the same purpose as the point man or flankers: to provide warning to the main body.
2. MCI's *Battle Drill Guide* has some useful "building block" techniques for this and other combat actions that are done by drill.
3. Colonel David H. Hackworth, *About Face*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), pp. 476-477.
4. Hackworth, PP. 627-628.
5. SSG Joe C. Aldermann, USA, *Reconnaissance Tips of the Trade*, Unpublished paper, pp. 18-19.
6. *Infantry in Battle*, (Washington D. C.: The Infantry Journal, Incorporated, 1939), p. 223.
7. Bruce I. Gudmundsson, *Stormtroop Tactics: Innovation in the German Army, 1914-1918*, (New York: Praeger, 1989), pp. 11-13.
8. Erwin Rommel, *Attacks* (Vienna , Va., Athena Press, Inc., 1979), p. 132.
9. Rommel, p. 132.

Chapter Exercise

1. As you move, you gain security through **stealth** and **protection.** Describe three techniques for **protecting** your unit.

2. Explain the general procedure for crossing a danger area.

3. What are two things you should do to train your unit to deal with mines and booby traps effectively?

4. What are the things you must do to move successfully in the face of enemy fire?

Exercise Solution

1. First, you protect your unit by giving it warning; through having scouts out front and Marines watching your flanks. That is why you have someone "on point:" to provide warning.

Second, you protect your unit by positioning your key weapons where they can quickly gain fire superiority if you make contact with the enemy. For example, you may have a SAW near the front of your unit, so it can quickly provide protective fires if you meet the enemy. You may put M-203s or SAWs on your flanks so that they can immediately suppress any enemy they encounter. In some situations, you may position your machineguns where they can overwatch your movement across an area.

Third, planning and calling for fire support is an effective, battle-tested means for protecting your unit. If you are a squad leader, you should always have a plan in your head for getting support from the company mortars. If you are a company commander, you should do the same with your forward observer (FO) and forward air controller (FAC). This is why you want to have an FO or FAC with you on a patrol: In a pinch, they can get fire support quickly by thinking ahead and planning targets on likely ambush sites along your movement route. However, keep in mind that every one needs to be able to call for supporting arms. Not every unit is going to have an FO or FAC, and not every FO or FAC is going to survive contact with the enemy.

The key for protection is to **think ahead at all times.** It is similar to defensive driving on the freeway; you want to look beyond the car just in front of you, to be prepared for what might happen further down the road. You don't want to be caught daydreaming and have to react at the last second. (See pages 62-63.)

2. The general procedure for crossing a danger area is:

First, recon the area as much as time and the need for speed permit. Ideally, you should recon it before your whole unit gets there.

Second, find the best place to cross it. "Best" usually means the place where you will be least observed and least exposed to fire.

Third, designate near and far side rallying points in case your unit gets scattered. Make sure everyone knows where they are.

Fourth, decide how best to provide security. You may want to move fast, deployed as skirmishers, with some Marines such as SAW gunners in over-watch. Or you might recon the far side and the flanks to make sure the enemy's not lying in ambush. The choice is situational, based on the time you have available and the likelihood of enemy contact.

Finally, once you are through the open area, regroup quickly, count noses, and keep going. (See pages 66-67.)

3. First, get some simulators. You will probably have to make them yourself. Use your own ingenuity to come up with simulators that make a noise and mark the man. Then, integrate them into every aspect of your training. Your goal is to create a mind-set among your Marines that makes them **always** look for mines and booby-traps, **always** suspect that something that appears perfectly innocent may be one. You cannot do that just by holding "blocks of instruction" on mines and booby-traps. Instead, they must be everywhere, whenever you are training. (See pages 68-69.)

4. First, you must achieve fire superiority. It means that the enemy fears your fire more than he has confidence in his own. The best way to get fire superiority is to suppress the enemy with fire as soon as you encounter him, so he perceives that the volume of fire coming in on him is much higher than the volume of fire he is putting out.

Second, you must convert general fire superiority into effective suppression of enemy weapons that cover the route you want to follow. Suppression clears that route of enemy fire. It requires killing, incapacitating, or keeping down the heads of the enemy soldiers manning those weapons. It is a focused, more intense version of your general fire superiority, which you must maintain as you suppress along one particular axis.

Third, you must move. Generally, your objective will be to move around or through the enemy so as to get behind him. Your suppression lets you do this. You

also use microterrain, vegetation, low visibility weather conditions, smoke, and camouflage for concealment while moving.

Finally, you must keep moving. Continual movement is important for security. If you keep moving, other enemy units "moving toward the sound of the guns" will arrive after you have gone. If you stop, you may find yourself having to fight through another enemy unit before you can resume your mission. (See page 72-74.)

CHAPTER 4

TECHNIQUES FOR THE ATTACK

INTRODUCTION: THE ATTACK AND THE ASSAULT

In *Tactical Fundamentals*, you learned that war is a clash between two hostile and independent wills. In combat, the way you impose your will on the enemy is to attack him. What do you picture when you think of an attack? Many Marines envision troops on line advancing directly on the enemy, firing as they walk or run, to close with and destroy him. This is the image we are used to seeing in the movies. In fact, what many Marines think of as an attack is actually an assault.

If Marines advancing on line isn't an attack, what is? General Heinz Gaedke gives a good example of an attack on the Eastern Front in World War II:

> *My idea was to infiltrate at night where the enemy wasn't--using single files to move deep into the Russian position. Where was he likely not to be? We chose routes between the fortified positions and the balkas (dry river beds) where he was sleeping in his dug-outs. So at 10:00 that night we moved two battalions in, quietly and in single file--not a shot was fired. When they got to the river bank, they turned around and spread out to set up positions to block the enemy's escape routes along the balkas. When he woke up in the morning, the door was shut behind him. At dawn, using a few individual tanks that were at hand, we shot up the fortified bunkers from the front. Then we used a few of our infiltrated men sweeping back from the river to capture the Russians remaining in the dug-outs. Our losses? One thumb shot off! Not a Russian got out.*[1]

Gaedke's attack moved upon the enemy to destroy him. But it did so in the manner most likely to avoid the enemy's combat power. His troops did not assault at all. There were no lines of German infantrymen moving frontally into the Russian's fire.

Contrast this example with an attack by a French brigade in 1915:

The assault column would form prior to H-hour with each wave completely deployed in a line of skirmishers. At H-hour all waves would move forward "and not allow themselves to be stopped by obstacles or by enemy fire."

Thus a mass of 6000 bayonets was to assault on a front of 800 meters. Enthusiasm ran high, for this was the third day of a great French offensive--an offensive that would bring Germany to her knees. The troops were confident that the hour of decisive victory was at hand.

And so, at the appointed hour, this brigade of 6000 high-hearted and determined men stood up and at the word of command fixed their bayonets, shouldered their rifles, and marched forward in quick time and in step to assault an entrenched enemy armed with machineguns. One can only surmise the thought in the minds of those German gunners as they saw the dense and seried waves of skirmishers marching stolidly toward them.

As the leading wave approached the German position the French artillery lifted and the enemy's artillery, machineguns and rifles opened with a concerted roar. The leading wave went down, the others surging forward were literally blown apart. In a matter of minutes the attack had melted away.[2]

The next day the French repeated the same performance and failed again. In the two attacks, the brigade lost more than 50 percent of its men, including nearly all its officers. The French paid dearly for confusing the attack with the assault, and for assaulting with a technique that modern firepower had rendered obsolete.

How do these two examples help define the attack? They show that an attack is a matter of moving on the enemy. In both examples, the attacker does that. But in the first case, where the attack succeeds, the attacker does more than that. He moves **through** the enemy. By thinking in terms of moving through the enemy, to get at something behind him (in this case his line of retreat and a river that blocked it), the Germans naturally sought the line of least resistance and least fighting. They did not confuse the attack with the assault.

Thus, you see the definition of the attack as *moving through the enemy to get at something of critical importance.* An assault is actually an element of the attack. Often times an assault is the climax of an attack, though not every attack culminates in an assault. Think of the attack as your movement to the objective. During your movement, your unit may be exposed to enemy fires, but this exposure is generally minimal. When you reach your objective, you are going to try to take it or destroy it so that the enemy can't use it. This is the assault. Generally, during an assault, your unit is going to be most exposed to enemy fires.

The attack, then, is more than just fighting the enemy. It is looking beyond the enemy immediately in front of you to get at your objective. That enemy blocks your way to something you want, either access to the his rear area or something more specific in there. That is why you must think of the attack as a movement **through** the enemy. The essence of the attack isn't throwing your bodies against his bullets. It's moving through his forward positions to get something you want. There may be times when what you want are his forward positions, or the enemy himself. That is when you would assault.

Understanding that an attack is a movement not just on, but **through** the enemy helps explain what techniques are appropriate in the attack. Techniques that overcome the enemy immediately before you, but leave you too exhausted, too late, or too weakened by casualties to continue on through him are not useful. In the next section, you will learn some techniques that enable you to attack through the enemy.

TECHNIQUES FOR THE ATTACK

In looking at techniques for the attack, it's helpful to consider them in a natural sequence, a sequence derived from the idea of attacking through the enemy. When you attack, the first event that is likely to occur is to make contact with the enemy. You move forward, and you bump into an enemy who blocks your path. Immediately, you must achieve fire superiority. As you learned in the previous chapter, the best way to achieve fire superiority is to *immediately engage the enemy by fire*. You will quickly know whether that action achieves fire superiority or not. If it does, the enemy's fire slackens and becomes inaccurate since he must get his head down. If not, your fire slackens as your Marines seek cover.

What happens if you don't achieve fire superiority? Usually, you can't continue moving forward through the enemy. Sometimes, terrain or other cover allows you to move without fire superiority; that is situational, so it is one of the judgments you, the leader, must make.

But in most cases, you need to regain fire superiority before you can move. How can you do this? You must bring in additional fire support, concentrated on the area where you want to move and the enemy weapons which dominate that area. First, you do this with the weapons immediately at hand. The key here is to **focus** your fires. Even if the enemy has more firepower, you may be able to regain fire superiority if you carefully focus all your fires on the specific area where you want to move. As a leader, you will need to think through how to do this, position your weapons accordingly, then have them open up all at once. In effect, you re-fight the initial battle for the fire superiority that you lost, but now you do it with all your weapons focused on just a small portion of the enemy, the portion that dominates the place where you want to move. This is one of the many applications of the concept of focus of effort.

Once you achieve fire superiority, or find a way to move without it, you must suppress the enemy. Suppression is a form of fire superiority. If you focused your fires to achieve superiority, you probably also achieved suppression. Suppression stops the fire of enemy weapons directly opposing your attack or reduces that fire to the point where you can move forward without crippling losses.

Attack by Infiltration

Let's suppose that you have achieved fire superiority and effectively suppressed the enemy weapons that cover the area where you want to move. What comes next?

You move through the enemy--the nature of the attack. One way to do this is by **infiltrating**. The German attack mentioned at the beginning of this chapter was an attack by infiltration in one of its two basic forms. Using the cover of darkness, the Germans sneaked through the Russian positions. There was no combat, no firing. By advancing in single file column along several routes, they avoided the enemy. Their goal was to get behind the Russian positions.

That is a good description of a "covert" infiltration in which you advance while remaining undetected. How you remain undetected varies according to the situation. You may move at night or during poor weather; you may use close terrain to conceal your movement. Or you may use your knowledge of the enemy's locations or habitual patterns to infiltrate his positions. Similarly, whether your unit moves in single file columns, small groups, or even as individuals also depends on the situation.

Once you have infiltrated, you may encircle the unit you just moved through, cutting it off. You may ambush enemy troops as they withdraw through your positions, a common and effective Chinese technique in Korea. You may continue on into their depth, overrunning and destroying their artillery, headquarters, and log trains. What you do depends on the critical vulnerability you are trying to get at in the enemy's rear areas. What characterizes the attack by filtration is not the objective, which varies, but the means of attacking: *moving through the enemy while remaining undetected.*

Because of the density of enemy troops on the field, the terrain, the weather, or some other factor, you may not always be able to slip undetected into the enemy's rear. You may find that you have to fight through some of the enemy's forward positions in order to get behind him. That doesn't mean you can't use infiltration techniques to attack. The same basic principles of infiltration still apply. What you must do is handle each contact so as to minimize the amount of fighting and the delay it brings. You sneak past the enemy where you can; you use terrain to protect yourself from the enemy's fire; you suppress and move around the enemy; and where you have no other choice, you assault his positions and destroy him. Your Marines move in small groups; each group advances independently, not waiting for those behind them, and not halting because units to their left or right have been stopped by the enemy.

This "fighting" infiltration was the essence of German Stormtroop tactics in World War I. The object is the same as in the attack by covert infiltration: to move through the enemy with as little contact as possible. The only difference is the amount of contact, and the fact that contact usually means fighting. You are not attacking to fight the enemy, but to get through him. Getting into his rear area with the least amount of fighting is the goal of infiltration.

In *Attacks*, Lt Erwin Rommel describes how he used a fighting infiltration at the Battle of Caporetto in 1917:

I singled out Lance Corporal Kiefner of the 2d Company, gave him eight men, and told him to move up the path as if he and his men were Italians returning from the front, to penetrate into the hostile position and capture the garrison on both sides of the path. They were to do this with a minimum of shooting and hand grenade throwing. In case a battle developed they were assured of fire protection and support by the entire detachment. Kiefner understood, and selected his companions. A few minutes later Kiefner led his patrol up the camouflaged path. Their rhythmical steps died away--would it work? We listened tensely, ready to attack or to furnish steady fire. One shot would send three companies off to the attack. Again long, anxious minutes passed and we heard nothing but the steady rain on the trees. Then steps approached, and a soldier reported in a low voice: "The Kiefner scout squad has captured a hostile dugout and taken seventeen Italians and a machinegun. The garrison suspects nothing."

Thereupon I led the whole Rommel detachment (2d and 1st Companies, and 1st Machine-Gun Company) up the path and into the hostile position. The Schiellein detachment (3d and 6th Companies and 2d Machine-Gun Company), which had joined me shortly before Kiefner's successful breakthrough, followed us. Assault teams noiselessly widened the breach until we had fifty yards on either side of the path. Several dozen Italians, who had sought shelter in their dugouts from the streaming rain, were thus captured by the skillful mountain troops. Thanks to the heavy cover the enemy farther up the slope did not perceive the movement of the six companies.

I then had to decide whether I should roll up the hostile position or break through in the direction of Hevnik Peak. I chose the latter. The elimination of the Italian positions was easy once we had possession of the peak. The farther we penetrated into the hostile zone of defense, the less prepared were the garrisons for our arrival, and the easier the fighting. I did not worry about contact to right and left. Six companies of the Wurttemberg Mountain Battalion were able to protect their own flanks. The attack order stated: "Without limiting the day's

activities in space or time, continue the advance to the west, knowing that we have strong reserves near and behind us."[3]

Noted British military theorist Liddell Hart draws a useful analogy of the fighting infiltration attack to flowing water:

> *If we watch a torrent bearing down on each successive bank or earthen dam in its path, we see that it first beats against the obstacle, feeling and testing it at all points.*
>
> *Eventually, it finds a small crack at some point. Through this crack pour the first driblets of water and rush straight on.*
>
> *The pent-up water on each side is drawn towards the breach. It swirls through and around the flanks of the breach, wearing away the earth on each side and so widening the gap.*
>
> *Simultaneously the water behind pours straight through the breach between the side eddies which are wearing away the flanks. Directly it has passed through it expands to widen once more the onrush of the torrent. Thus as the water pours through in ever-increasing volume the onrush of the torrent swells to its original proportions, leaving in turn each crumbling obstacle behind it.*
>
> *Thus Nature's forces carry out the ideal attack, automatically maintaining the speed, the breadth, and the continuity of the attack.*[4]

In combat, infiltration is an effective technique for attacking. Regardless of how you are able to infiltrate, the concept is the same: *get into the enemy's rear area as quickly as possible with as little fighting as possible.*

Whether you attack by infiltration or some other action, there will be times when you must engage and destroy an enemy unit facing you. It may be that the unit is blocking you from moving forward and you have tried to suppress it and failed. Perhaps, you are in a low intensity conflict where one of the strategic objectives

is the enemy units themselves. Or you may be a follow-on echelon in an attack by infiltration, with the mission of securing a breach for the reserve to advance through. For whatever reason, you must destroy the enemy unit opposing you. How do you do it?

Attack by Envelopment

In an envelopment, your goal is to get around the enemy's flanks and either cut him off, causing him to surrender, or to assault him from the rear on one or both flanks. Generally, a supporting attack provides a diversion for the enemy to allow your enveloping force to maneuver around a weak or undefended flank. Just as in an infiltration, your enveloping force seeks the path of least resistance and moves **through** the enemy. The difference here is that your enveloping force then turns and assaults the enemy's exposed rear or flank. If your goal is to cut him off and force his surrender, you will probably want to make a complete circle around him, and strengthen it to the point where he cannot hope to break out of it. Units that are cut off are often willing to surrender.

An attack by envelopment is not only limited to units, or objectives, to your immediate front. Using a supporting attack to divert the enemy's attention, an enveloping force can go around the flanks of an enemy force and move deep into his rear. Once cut off, the enemy unit is likely to collapse. Again, the basic concept of **moving through** the enemy applies whether you are infiltrating or enveloping.

TECHNIQUES FOR THE ASSAULT

As in the attack, fire superiority is critical to your success in the assault. You do this using your organic and attached weapon systems, such as SAWs, heavy machineguns, or tanks, as well as fire support assets, such as artillery, naval gunfire, or air. In the assault it is critical that you be able to move onto and through the enemy. You can't do this if he can shoot at you.

To achieve fire superiority in the assault, you have to be able to keep the enemy from raising his head up and shooting at you. That means your weapons have to be able to fire more accurately and with a greater volume of fire than the enemy's. You don't have to be able to destroy the enemy or keep him hunkered down for days at

a time. You just want to keep his head down long enough for you to get to him.

Having good techniques for the attack will allow you to effectively move through the enemy toward your objective. If you are either extremely skilled or extremely lucky, you will be able to move through the enemy directly to your objective without having to expose your Marines to enemy fires. However, at some point in combat you are going to have to assault the enemy.

Assault by Penetration

In an assault by penetration, you divide your unit into three elements. The first is a **suppression** element, in which you concentrate your firepower. Its job is to suppress the enemy's fire at the point where you want to penetrate. The second element is the **assault** element. It makes the assault itself, moving directly forward against the enemy's position and aiming at the point where your suppressive fire is concentrated (which will usually be the point you think is weakest). The assault unit's mission is to make a penetration: a small hole, an opening, or a gap. Through the gap, you send your third element, the **exploitation** element. Its mission is to move forward through the gap and to either destroy the enemy by rolling up his positions along the flanks or continue the advance into the enemy's rear (see figure 4-1). A combination of the two is also possible. As usual, the exploitation element's specific mission depends on the situation.

The most important point to realize is that the logic of both the assault by penetration and the attack by infiltration is the same. In both cases, you seek gaps that lead into the enemy's rear area. In the one case, you can find a gap; in the other, you must create the gap. But what you are trying to do is the same: to attack **through** the enemy and get into his rear.

A--Suppression element.
B--Assault element.
C--Exploitation element.

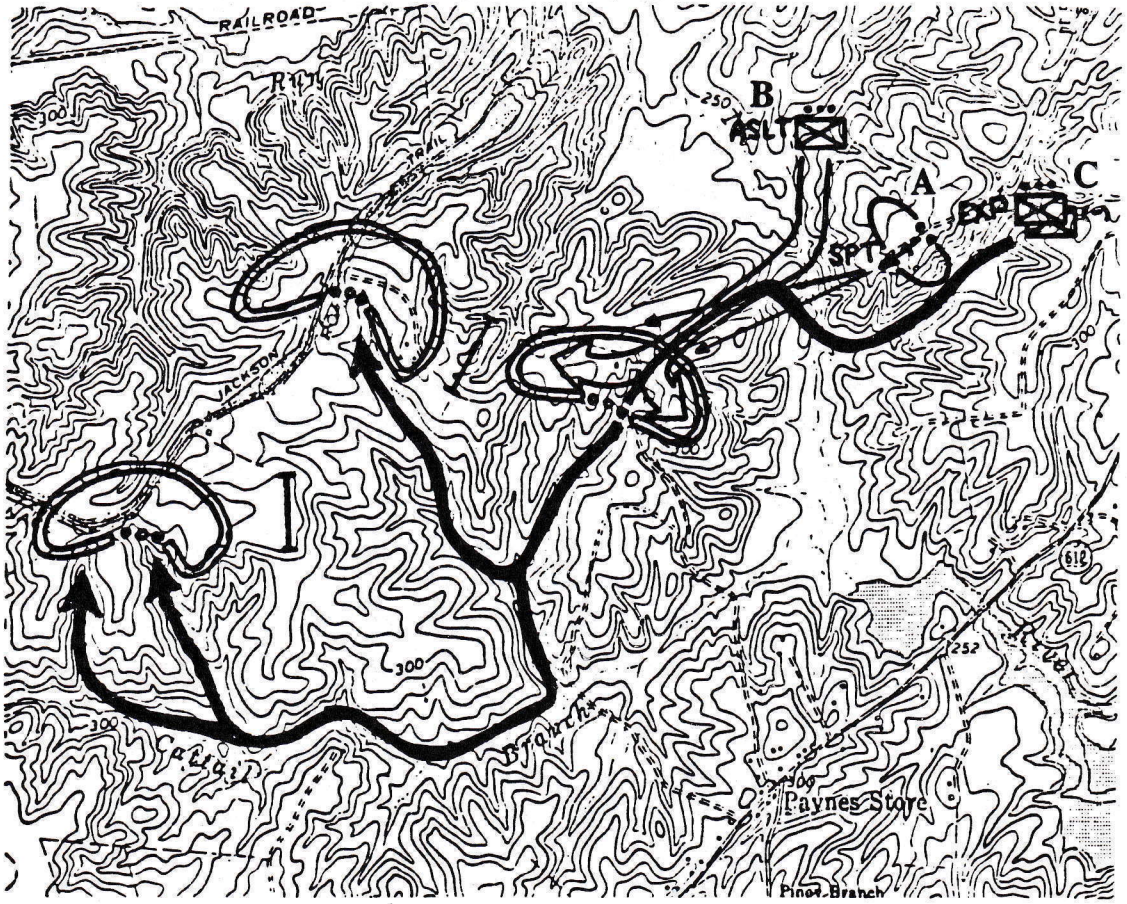


Fig 4-1. The Three Element Assault.

On-Line Assault

As a technique, the on-line assault is probably the one most Marines are familiar with. In the on-line assault, your Marines literally get on line and advance walking or running on the enemy. Unless you have a tremendous amount of firepower and good terrain, the on-line assault can be suicidal for your unit. There are few situations that would call for this type of technique. Carefully consider all your options before you risk your Marines' lives. In his book, *About Face*, Colonel David Hackworth describes an on-line assault that he observed in combat in Vietnam in 1966:

> *. . . Then I saw the Tigers on the attack--and I couldn't believe my eyes. Gardner and his people were walking across the open field between the bridge and Murphy's position. They'd forded the river (many of them were soaked to the neck), and now they were marching straight across that field in a perfect skirmish line, like Pickett's division at Gettysburg. I was stunned. I'd given Gardner a mission-type order. I didn't tell him how to do it. He was one of the best and most experienced lieutenants in the battalion, so I'd just assumed he would take the well-concealed approach to My Canh--quite obvious from the knob where he'd begun--along a dry streambed on his flank. Now it was too late for him to turn around, and there was no way to stop him; all the '02 guys in the village could do was start putting as much suppressive fire as they could on the face of the hedgerow to Gardner's front, to keep the enemy down. Incredibly, the Tigers were taking no casualties as they advanced toward My Canh. In fact, it seemed as though they weren't even being fired on. But then, about twenty meters from our position, with one step they walked into a wall of lead.*
>
> *Our opponent was indeed a force to be reckoned with. The discipline of this element of the 95th NVA, so skillfully dug in and camouflaged along their hedgerow wall, was iron-tight. Not one shot had been fired prematurely, and when they did open up, they mowed my Tigers down from end to end across that open field. Those who survived immediately charged the tree line*

through the fire (an act that took courage beyond words), and from that moment on, . . . it was bloody hand-to-hand with the enemy all the way.[5]

EXPLOITING SUCCESS

Let's assume that your unit has assaulted successfully as part of an attack by infiltration. What do you do next? Again, you keep on moving through the enemy, as fast as you can. This involves two separate but related actions. The first is **reinforcing success.** When you find or, with an assault, create a gap in the enemy's positions, you go through it. But you also call units behind you to follow you through. First, this means that the precise direction of the attack flows from the bottom up, not from the top down. If you are a squad leader, you may be calling a platoon or a company to follow you. If you are a platoon commander, you may be calling a company or a battalion. Your success "pulls" the attack in your direction. You cannot go running back to the company or battalion CO in some headquarters and say, "Sir, I've found a gap, I suggest you follow me." That is much too slow; the enemy will have countered and plugged the gap by the time the decision is made. To generate the "expanding torrent" about which Liddell Hart writes, units in the lead must be allowed to call the units behind them through the gaps which they find or create.

Of course, lead units must have units behind them. To provide these units, an attack is usually **in echelon.** Behind the lead units that are "pioneering" the way through the enemy, other larger units are "stacked up." Creating the "expanding torrent," they follow the paths blazed by the lead units. Without them, you have no torrent, only a dribble. How much the units are stacked up or spread out behind the lead units depends on the situation, particularly the density of the battlefield. But they must almost always be there unless the density is so low that you are in effect hunting small groups of enemy in a large area. Then your attack essentially becomes a series of patrols to locate these small groups of enemy.

Reinforcing success is largely a matter of calling the units in echelon behind you through the gaps you find or make so that, moving through the enemy, they can join the attack. It is an important part of the attack, because it looks beyond the assault.

Another important technique is related closely to it: *maintaining the momentum of the attack.* The forward movement of the stacked echelons contribute to

maintaining the momentum of the attack, but there is more to it than that. That "more" is largely a leadership challenge.

The challenge to maintaining the momentum of the attack is that human nature causes attacks to bog down. After a successful penetration, the leading elements tend to take a break and regroup. If they spot a new enemy blocking their advance, they tend to stop, think the new situation over, and probably try to contact their superior for orders or get some fire support. If they see the units to their left or right held up by the enemy, they tend to stop too. They may get uncomfortable about the extended flanks which their attack offers to the enemy, flanks that are vulnerable to counterattack. All these factors and many others combine to bring attacks slowly to a halt.

You can't let that happen. When you have penetrated an enemy, you have to keep your Marines moving forward. You have to move immediately against any new enemy blocking your path. You have to keep going when your neighbors are blocked, trusting in the speed of your advance to provide security. In short, you have to **keep attacking**, to keep moving through the enemy to those critical vulnerabilities deep in his rear area.

If you think of some of the field problems you have been on, you will quickly realize that this is one of a leader's main challenges in combat. Even in peacetime exercises, attacks quickly bog down. When was the last time you saw a real **attack** in a field problem, as opposed to an assault followed by a consolidation on the newly acquired piece of terrain?

As a combat leader, you are not in the real estate business. Your job in the attack is much more than grabbing terrain and waiting there for it to go up in value. By the very nature of the attack, your mission is to get through he though the enemy tanks and infantry opposing you in order to get at a critical vulnerability deep in the enemy's rear area. You must do that as fast as possible with as few losses as possible.

PATROLLING

Patrolling is basic to the attack, to the defense, to simply controlling an area--to just about everything you do. What is it?

In an article titled *Light Infantry Tactics at the Company Level and Below*, Captain John Schmitt offers this description of patrolling:

> *What is a patrol but a small unit specially organized and equipped for a particular mission--self-reliant, self-contained, operating independently and separated from other friendly units?*
>
> *. . . The missions of a patrol may vary greatly, demanding adaptability. Since the patrol operates independently, at least within the conduct of its particular mission, initiative and self-reliance at the small unit level are essential. Detached from friendly units, there is no front or rear; all-around security is essential. The only assistance from higher headquarters comes in the form of supporting arms or possibly air-delivered supplies.*
>
> *The patrol moves stealthfully across often difficult terrain. Vulnerable to enemy fire, it relies on concealment for protection. For this reason, patrols often operate at night. . . .*
>
> *While the patrol employs well rehearsed techniques performed quickly and smoothly, it has no standard tactics. Rather, it adapts to the exigencies of the mission, the enemy, and the terrain. And to patrol effectively over time, . . . units must develop new techniques which, like the old ones, in turn are rehearsed until they become instinctive.*[6]

Here is a simpler definition of patrolling. Patrolling is taking a walk around the neighborhood. But it is not just a pleasant stroll you take when you patrol. It is walking a beat, as a policeman does. The policeman walks his neighborhood beat to see what is going on: What the neighbors are doing, who is home and whose place is vacant, what seems out of place, and who is in the neighborhood that doesn't belong there. He walks his beat with the purpose not only of seeing, but of observing.

One of literature's greatest observers was Sherlock Holmes. One day he asked Watson how many times he had seen the steps leading to their apartment. When

Watson replied, "*Frequently.*" Holmes persisted, "*How often?*" "*Well, some hundreds of times,*" replied Watson. "*Then how many are there?*" asked Holmes. "*How many! I don't know,*" Watson confessed. "*Quite so!*" concluded Holmes, "*You have not observed. And yet you have seen.*"[7]

If he is good, the policeman on his beat does not merely see, he observes. The good patrol also observes. That is always one of its purposes. Sometimes it may also have other purposes, such as setting up an ambush or otherwise engaging the enemy if it finds him, but observing still remains a main purpose. And just as the cop on his beat is looking for something, so is the patrol. The policeman is looking for signs of crime or criminals. The patrol is looking for signs of the enemy or the enemy himself.

For some policemen, their beat includes walking and observing in a dangerous neighborhood. If the pliceman does not pay attention, stay alert, and stay in touch with other policemen over his radio, he may quickly be a dead policeman. The same is true for your patrol in combat. If you just saunter through the woods, thinking of your tired feet, the beer you'd like to have when you get back, or how boring it is to patrol an area where nothing ever seems to happen, you may become a dead patrol. Patrolling well is a fine art.

How do you patrol well? There is one basic concept that marks the difference between a poor patrol and a good one. *The good patrol is prepared for just about anything that can happen.* Of course, the enemy can always surprise you. But the good patrol is also prepared for being surprised.

How can you prepare your patrol for just about anything that can happen? First, you **anticipate.** You, the patrol leader, must mentally "walk yourself" through the entire patrol, anticipating what your mission requires you to do and what can possibly happen. You consider your route, anticipating dangerous locations along the way and how you will handle them. If you're to lead an ambush patrol, you mentally "game" your actions at the ambush site, thinking through all aspects of the ambush. You also begin to develop contingency plans because you know that in combat, things seldom go exactly as planned. Good contingency planning means that you anticipate problems during your patrol and develop solutions for them in advance. For example, problems like Marines getting ambushed, lost, or separated, must be anticipated and planned for. The better you think through your entire patrol, the better your planning and preparation will be.

Once you have thought through your patrol, you develop a plan and issue a patrol order. In issuing your order, you talk through the patrol with your Marines. You lead them through your plan, giving them important information and explaining how you will conduct the patrol. Of course, as you talk through the patrol with your Marines, you want their input. They may anticipate things that you have overlooked. When you're done, everyone should have a clear picture of your plan for the patrol.

Another aspect of good preparations is rehearsing actions that you anticipate having to do on patrol. For example, figure 4-2 outlines the actions that are common to most ambush patrols. Rehearsing these actions is important because for as many situations as you can anticipate, you want your Marines to act properly on cue, not to stop and have to ask for directions. For example, by rehearsing your movement into the ambush site, each Marine in the patrol knows what he must do and when to do it. This saves time and makes the patrol more effective since you don't have to stop and issue detailed orders in the Objective Rally Point (ORP).

All of the actions listed in figure 4-2 can be broadly grouped in two categories. The first category includes actions that all patrols do routinely, such as departing and reentering friendly lines and crossing danger areas. These actions should be covered in unit SOPs. If your unit does not have a useful patrolling SOP, you should create one. Good SOPs can save you time and energy since you don't have to always "start over" each time you organize and prepare a patrol. This is particularly important because when preparing for a patrol, you will **never** have as much time as you would like to rehearse. An effective unit SOP allows you to better use the time that you have available.

The second category includes actions that are unique to that particular patrol. These usually include things like a raid on an enemy installation or actions for breaching an unusual obstacle along your route. If your unit has a sound patrolling SOP, then you will probably spend the most time rehearsing these actions as you prepare for a patrol. Often, these are the most important actions to rehearse because they occur where you anticipate contact with the enemy. If time does not permit you to rehearse every anticipated action, then you must decide which are the most important ones and rehearse them.

However, you know that things seldom go just as they should in combat. Sometimes the enemy will surprise you. How can you be prepared if you are surprised?

Effective battle drills are the general answer to surprise. The problem with surprise is that you have no time to think. You cannot sit down and say, "Well, what should we do now?" The enemy has got you, and bullets and grenades are flying. You must react instantly. You can, with battle drills. But you can't start learning battle drills at that point. You have to practice and learn them to the point where they are automatic. You or another Marine yells, "Ambush!" Everyone immediately goes into your counter-ambush battle drill, just as they have so many times in your training.

1. **Movement to the Objective Area:**
   - --Procedures for departing friendly lines.
   - --Actions at danger areas.
   - --Actions during halts.
   - --Actions on enemy contact:
     - +Getting caught in an ambush.
     - +Chance contact with the enemy.
     - +Hastily ambushing an enemy unit.
   - --Breaching obstacles.
   - --Actions if patrol members get lost or separated.

2. **Actions in the Objective Area:**
   - --Establishing and moving into your Objective Rally Point (ORP).
   - --Conducting the reconnaissance of the ambush site.
   - --Moving into the ambush site.
   - --Improving the site (emplacing mines and booby traps, clearing fields of fire, etc.)
   - --Triggering the ambush.
   - --Securing POWs and searching enemy KIAs and WIAs.
   - --Withdrawing to the ORP.
   - --Disseminating information.
   - --Contingency plans.

3. **Movement From the Objective Area Back to Friendly Lines:**
   - --Actions at danger areas.
   - --Actions during halts.
   - --Actions on enemy contact.
     - +Getting caught in an enemy ambush.
     - +Chance contact with the enemy.
     - +Hastily ambushing an enemy unit.
   - --Actions if patrol members get lost or separated.
   - --Breaching obstacles.
   - --Procedures for reentering friendly lines.

Fig 4-2. Actions common to ambush patrols.

The last thing you need for good patrolling, along with anticipating the patrol, rehearsing, and effective battle drills, is good **infantry skills.** A good patrol has Marines who can scout and track. All the members of the patrol can move silently and keep cover. They all have good shooting skills, e.g., good quick-kill techniques. Good infantry skills are not inborn; they must be developed. Without them, your patrol will crash and bang around in the woods, making noise, getting lost, hitting mines and booby traps, and providing little more than target practice for the enemy.

There is one other point you, the leader, need to think about. When you first take your unit into combat, it will, of course, be a "green" unit. Everything will be new to your Marines: the country, the landscape, the vegetation, the local people, and the enemy. The skill levels in a "green" unit will not be as high as in a veteran unit, and the newness of everything makes it more likely they will get surprised. On the other hand, because everything is new, your Marines are likely to be alert and observant.

As your unit becomes a veteran unit, it will learn how best to operate in the environment and against the particular enemy. It will be less likely to get surprised. However, as the newness of everything wears off, your Marines will become less alert. After 99 patrols on which nothing happened, they will assume nothing will happen on the 100th patrol either. They may get lazy and sloppy. And that is when the enemy will hit them and clobber them.

Combat thus presents you with a challenge: You must keep your unit alert to keep it alive, in the inevitable boredom between contacts with the enemy. How do you do it? The same way that you prepare your unit when it is green: **training and discipline.** Training does not stop when you go to war. Good units not only train for war, they train **in** war as well. They train to keep up basic skills and standards that can atrophy over time. Because your Marines will want to rest when they aren't fighting, training between enemy contacts may not make you the most popular leader. But it may well make you one of the leaders whose Marines come home alive because they were properly and thoroughly trained.

Good discipline is similarly important. Marines in well-disciplined units don't get sloppy and careless on patrol. Instead, they develop good habits, such as cleaning their weapons regularly and maintaining proper security at all times, so that when that "100th patrol" occurs, they are ready for it. You can't wait for combat to instill discipline; good habits that mark a well-disciplined unit must be instilled **now.**

CONCLUSION

The main theme that runs consistently through this course is that the concepts are the most important things. If you remember just one thing from this chapter, remember the central concept: In modern tactics, you attack **through** the enemy, not simply against him. The other techniques here follow logically from that basic concept. If you grasp the concept and practice it in the field, you will undoubtedly find other techniques that you can use to make it happen. That is as it should be; no one has a monopoly on techniques in modern combat. But if your concept of the attack is not modern, then all your techniques are likely to prove ineffective in the face of enemy fire. Don't make your Marines give their lives to learn the lessons you should have learned from history.

Notes

1. *Translation of Taped Conversion With Lieutenant General Heinz Gaedke*, (Columbus Ohio: Battelle Columbus Laboratories, 1979), p. 34.
2. *Infantry in Battle*, (Washington, D. C.: The Infantry Journal, Incorporated, 1939), pp. 225-226.
3. Erwin Rommel, *Attacks*, (Vienna, Va.: Athena Press, Inc., 1979), pp., 213-214.
4. Captain B. H. Liddell Hart, "The 'Man-in-the-Dark' Theory of Infantry Tactics and the 'Expanding Torrent System of Attack,' *Journal of the R. U. S. I.*, (February 1921), p. 13.
5. Colonel David H. Hackworth, *About Face*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), p. 503.
6. Capt John J. Schmitt, *Light Infantry Tactics at the Company Level and Below*, (*Marine Corps Gazette*, June, 1990), p. 49.
7. From the Sherlock Holmes mystery *A Scandal in Bohemia*.

Chapter Exercise

1. What is an attack? Why do you attack? What is the key difference between the attack and the assault?

2. Describe a "covert" infiltration type of attack.

3. Describe the three-element assault.

4. The key to patrolling well is being prepared for just about anything that can happen. How can you do this?

Exercise Solution

1. An attack is when you *move through the enemy to get at something of critical importance.* You look beyond the enemy immediately in front of you. That enemy blocks your way to something you want, either access to the enemy's rear area or something more specific in his rear area. You may attack to **penetrate** an enemy position in order to destroy his cohesion. Or, a **breakthrough** attack may be conducted as a means of gaining access to some facility you wish to destroy, or to gain access to anything that you want that is being protected by enemy forces. One of the best uses of the breakthrough is to thrust deep into the enemy's rear to disrupt and confuse him.

In the assault, you physically move upon the enemy. You **assault** his positions to destroy them. The assault may be part of an attack, but it is not the attack itself. In the attack, your goal is to get **through** the enemy to get at something behind him. (See pages 88-90.)

2. In infiltration, you advance while remaining undetected. How you remain undetected varies according to the situation. You may move at night or during poor weather; you may use close terrain to conceal your movement. Or you may use your knowledge of the enemy's locations or habitual patterns to infiltrate his positions. Similarly, whether your unit moves in single file columns, small groups, or even as individuals also depends on the situation.

Once you have infiltrated, you may encircle the unit you just moved through, cutting them off. You may ambush them as they withdraw through you, a common and effective Chinese technique in Korea. You may continue on into their depth, overrunning and destroying their artillery, headquarters, and log trains. What you do depends on the critical vulnerability you are trying to get at in the enemy's rear areas. What characterizes the attack by infiltration is not the objective, which varies, but the means of attacking: **moving through the enemy while remaining undetected.** (See pages 91-92.)

3. In the three element assault, you divide your unit into three elements. The first is a **suppression** element, in which you concentrate your firepower. Its job is to suppress the enemy's fire at the point where you want to penetrate. The second

element is the **assault** element. It makes the assault itself, moving directly forward against the enemy's position and aiming at the point where your suppressive fire is concentrated (which will usually be the point that you think is weakest). The assault unit's mission is to make a penetration: a small hole, opening, or gap. Through the gap, you send your third element, the **exploitation** element. Its mission is to move forward through the gap and to either destroy the enemy by rolling up his positions along the flanks, or continue the advance into the enemy's rear. (See pages 96-97.)

4. First, you **anticipate.** You, the patrol leader, must mentally "walk yourself" through the entire patrol, anticipating what your mission requires you to do and what can possibly happen. You consider your route, anticipating dangerous locations along the way and how you will handle them. If you're to lead an ambush patrol, you mentally "game" your actions at the ambush site, thinking through all aspects of the ambush. You also begin to develop contingency plans because you know that in combat, things seldom go exactly as planned. Good contingency planning means that you anticipate problems during your patrol and develop solutions for them in advance. For example, problems like Marines getting ambushed, lost, or separated, must be anticipated and planned for. The better you think through your entire patrol, the better your planning and preparation will be.

Once you have thought through your patrol, you develop a plan and issue a patrol order. In issuing your order, you talk through the patrol with your Marines. You lead them through your plan, giving them important information and explaining how you will conduct the patrol. Of course, as you talk through the patrol with your Marines, you want their input. They may anticipate things that you have overlooked. When you're done, everyone should have a clear picture of your plan for the patrol.

Third, you should rehearse actions that you anticipate having to do on patrol. This is important because for as many situations as you can anticipate, you want your Marines to act properly on cue, not to stop and have to ask for directions. For example, by rehearsing your movement into the ambush site, each Marine in the patrol knows what he must do and when to do it. This saves time and makes the patrol more effective since you don't have to stop and issue detailed orders in the Objective Rally Point (ORP).

However, you know that things seldom go just as they should in combat. Sometimes the enemy will surprise you. **Effective battle drills** are the general answer to surprise. You have to practice and learn them to the point where they are

automatic. You or another Marine yells, "Ambush!" Everyone immediately goes into your counter-ambush battle drill, just as they have so many times in your training. (See pages 102-105.)

CHAPTER 5

TECHNIQUES FOR THE DEFENSE

INTRODUCTION

What is a defense? To answer that question, you might just turn the definition of the attack on its head: The defense is *preventing the enemy from getting through to something in your rear that you want to protect* (which may be your rear itself; if the enemy gets there, he can cut you off and encircle you). That definition is correct--as far as it goes. But in modern war, there is more to the defense than that. A look at some history will help you see what that "more" is.

If you think of the defense in World War I, you probably picture a line of trenches packed with men shooting at an enemy who is advancing in waves through "no man's land." Until 1917, that was a typical World War I defense. But in that year, the Germans introduced a completely different type of defense: the defense in depth, which you studied in chapter two of *Tactical Fundamentals*. As you saw earlier, when the Allied troops got through no man's land, they did not find themselves facing a trench full of Germans. Instead, they ran into some machinegun "resistance nests:" small defensive strong points, designed for 360° defense, built around a machinegun. They also came under fire from small groups of German infantry fighting from shell holes. The deeper they penetrated the German defensive area, the thicker the resistance nests became. The attack began to lose its cohesion as more Allied units got pinned down fighting these machinegun positions and the roving groups of German infantry. In addition, they often found themselves fighting on reverse slopes, where their own artillery could not observe to support them. To add to their problems, hidden German artillery batteries opened up on them.

Once Allied troops were thoroughly enmeshed in this defensive web, disaster struck. A powerful German counterattack swept through them, going all the way to where the initial German defense had begun. The goal of the counterattack was not to push the Allies back, but to get behind them and encircle them.

The German defense in depth defense proved devastatingly effective. The British were accustomed to taking heavy casualties in their attacks. But they were shocked to find that, because of this new German defense, whole battalions were going into the attack--and no one was coming back.

This World War I example answers the question of what "more" is involved in modern defense besides keeping the enemy from going through you. *The defense is a way to destroy the enemy*. The Allies were not only unable to penetrate the new

German defense, the units they sent into the attack were destroyed by it. No one came back.

This helps answer the question, why do you defend. You defend to protect something behind you. You also defend to destroy the enemy. Here, you see how the attack and the defense blend in modern war. Both are means of destroying the enemy.

You might also defend when you are the weaker force. Sometimes, if you are much weaker than your enemy, you may choose to attack. You may judge that your only hope is an attack which he does not expect, one that throws him off balance so badly that his superior combat power does not count for much.

But generally, the weaker force defends. Why? Because the defense has a major advantage that compensates for the smaller force's weakness. That advantage is simple: The attacker must at some point get up and move in the face of the defender's fire. He must throw his bodies against the defender's bullets. As the last chapter showed you, there are ways to attack and even to assault that minimize this. But to some degree, it is almost always present in an attack. And in the face of modern weapons, it tends to be expensive in casualties. If the attacker does not use smart tactics, if he does things such as assaulting on-line, his casualties are likely to be very heavy. The attack fails, and the odds have been evened by the casualties he took. If he has suffered heavily in his attack, the odds may now favor the defender; he may now be the larger force, able to attack (running of course the risk of a similar performance if his tactics and techniques are not good). The power of modern weapons has led to the saying that "The defense is the stronger form of war." At the micro level--looking just at engagements--this is generally true.

CONCEPTS FOR THE DEFENSE

Just as your tactics and techniques must be modern in the attack if you are to succeed, the same is true of your tactics in the defense. What are the central concepts that guide your thinking about defense on the modern battlefield?

Perhaps the most important concept is **defense in depth.** A modern defense does not hold a line; rather, it controls an area. Think of the example of the German's defense in depth. The Allied attack penetrated the German "front line;"

it was allowed and expected to do so. The Germans defended a large area that ran deep behind that line. They used that area as a place in which to destroy the Allied attacker.[1] That is how modern defenses generally work.

You can see several other key concepts in that German World War I defense. It had the nature of an **ambush.** In many Marine Corps schools, you learn about ambushes as techniques. But modern defense reflects an **ambush mentality.** The ambush is based on surprise and shock. So was that German defense. The attacker was surprised and shocked by the counterattack that drove deep into his rear and cut him off. He was "bagged" before he could react. That is how modern defenses work. They "ambush" the enemy, hitting him in a way he does not expect when he does not expect it.

The German defense also used many ambushes, in the form of well-sited machineguns in resistance nests and groups of infantry, appearing suddenly, fighting from shell holes. Modern defenses often have a network of ambushes throughout the defensive area. Many small teams, working without centralized control, ambush the enemy whenever and wherever they can.

The **counterattack** is a central part of most modern defenses, just as it was for the Germans. It is not a frontal or flanking counterattack designed to push the enemy back out the door he just came in and restore the defense. Rather, it is a counterattack to get behind the enemy--just like an attack--and cut him off. The purpose of the counterattack is to destroy--kill or capture--the enemy attacker, not just to regain ground, although it usually does that too.

Much of the German 1917 defense was invisible to the attacker because it was on reverse slopes. The technique you use may (or may not) be a reverse slope, but the concept is the same: a modern defense is **invisible.** In this respect it also resembles an ambush. An ambush is invisible until it is sprung. By the time the enemy knows it is there, he has no time to react. That concept should guide all your defensive actions.

If your defense is visible, the enemy will attempt to smash it with firepower--artillery and air. Traditionally, Marines have not had to learn this lesson through experience. Since World War II, Marines have usually fought with an overwhelming superiority in firepower. Visible defenses are not nearly as vulnerable when you have such an advantage. Instead, it has usually been our enemies who were forced to

keep their defenses invisible. But in the future, you cannot count on the overwhelming firepower advantage that most Marine units had in the past. You must keep your defenses invisible.

The concept of defense in depth instead of linear defense can go farther than the Germans did in World War I. In modern light infantry tactics, the defense generally works **parallel** to the attack rather than across it. A good example is the Finnish *motti* defense in their war with the Soviet Union. The Soviet armored columns would penetrate deep into Finnish territory. The Finns would block the head of the column, then work all up and down its length with troops on skis. They cut the column up by attacking into it all along its length, reducing it to a chain of small pockets with no mutual support. The Soviets' losses were disastrous.

In the defense in depth, firepower is used in ways that surprise and shock the enemy. Generally, weapons hold their fire until the range is fairly short. Then everything opens up at once in a devastating storm of fire. The enemy not only suffers from the fire but from the shock effect. In contrast, until recently Marines were usually taught to open up at maximum range and bring the enemy under an increasing volume of fire, as in the HAW/MAW/LAW approach to anti-tank defense. This may inflict a few casualties on the enemy, but the main thing it does is give him warning of where your defense is strong so he can suppress it with supporting arms or go around it.

You will note that in these and most other examples of modern defense, *attack and defense blend*. The defense is not a matter of waiting passively. It is highly active, working up and down the flanks of enemy penetrations, counterattacking where and whenever there is a good opportunity to do so, setting ambushes, etc. Such a blend of attacking and defending is a central concept of modern tactics.

These concepts were discussed at greater length in the first two courses of this program. They are repeated here because of this course's approach to teaching techniques: You must understand the concepts first. Techniques are an expression of the concepts; they are not something arbitrary that you learn or memorize. You must be able to develop techniques from the concepts because whatever techniques you start with in combat the enemy will quickly adjust to. Then, you will need to develop new ones.

DEFENSIVE TECHNIQUES

As noted, modern defenses are area defenses. There are a number of techniques by which you can organize an area defense. In broad terms, there are four basic techniques: a focused defense, a dispersed defense, a perimeter defense and a linear defense.

A **focused** defense is where you intend to fight the enemy in one place within the defensive area. You may decide that the terrain, vegetation, habits of your enemy, etc., will lead him to a certain place where you can engage him advantageously. You then focus all your combat power on that area. For example, you may plan to hit him in that area from the front and both flanks with fire, then counterattack into his rear. The Army calls this a "web" defense, as illustrated in figure 5-1.

In a **dispersed** defense, you decide to engage the enemy throughout the defensive area. To do that, you disperse part or all of your force in small ambushes and/or positions (which of course should be concealed). You may also use a counterattack, or a number of small counterattacks in this defense. This is a typical light infantry defense. (Figure 5-2 is an example of a dispersed defense.)

A **perimeter** defense is used where you must defend something such as a fuel farm, some fixed target that is valuable. A perimeter defense surrounds the object you must protect, defending it from all sides (see figure 5-3). It must be dispersed to some extent. But, depending on the situation, you may decide to focus it in sectors.

Finally, there is a **linear** defense. As noted earlier, this is a weak form of defense because once it is penetrated at one point it is useless. The enemy can and will push most of his forces through the penetration, driving on into your depth and rolling out behind your forces that remain in the line. In general, you should only use a linear defense against weak opposition. Even then, you should keep a strong reserve to deal with penetrations. At one point, Napoleon's staff presented him with a linear defense for the borders of France. He responded, "*What is it for? To prevent smuggling?*"

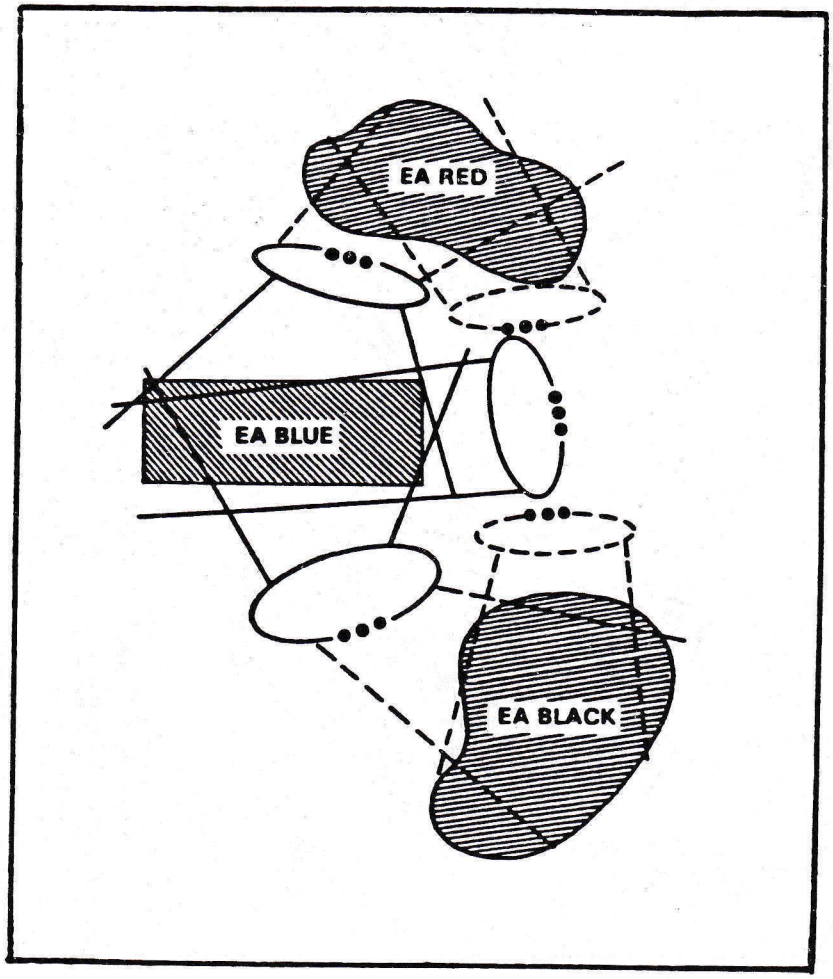


Fig 5-1. Web Defense.

Fig 5-2. Dispersed Defense.

Reverse Slope Defense

Within these broad techniques, there are many more specific techniques you can use. An important one is the **reverse slope** defense. (See figure 5-4.)[2] Many Marine defenses today are on forward slopes. The rationale is that a forward slope defense

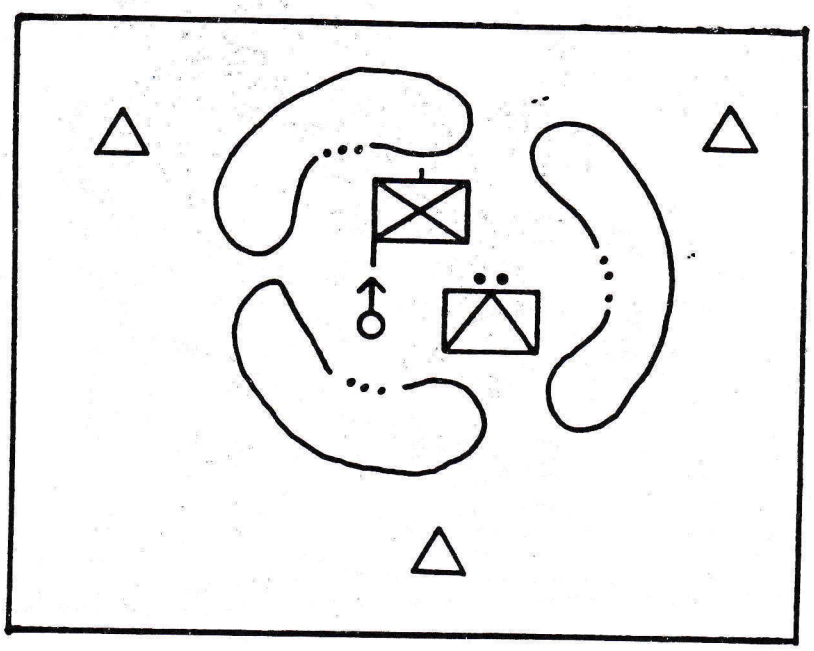


Fig 5-3. Perimeter Defense.

enables the defenders to open fire at maximum range. As noted earlier, that is not necessarily an advantage because it gives your defense away to the enemy at what is usually small cost to him in casualties. Worse, a forward slope defense may be visible to the enemy. Knowing where it is, he can go around it or smash it with fire.

A reverse slope defense protects you from both enemy observation and fire. Because your location is hidden from the enemy as he approaches you, it enables you to surprise him. It is a defense on the rear of a hill or elevation. The enemy does not encounter it until he crests the hill (you will usually have some covert outposts on the crest or forward slope to keep you informed of his movements). Then, he suddenly finds himself in a hail of fire. Like all techniques, a reverse slope defense must be used according to the situation. There may be some situations where you defend on a forward slope, such as when you face an enemy with little or no artillery. But in many situations reverse slope defenses may be more effective.

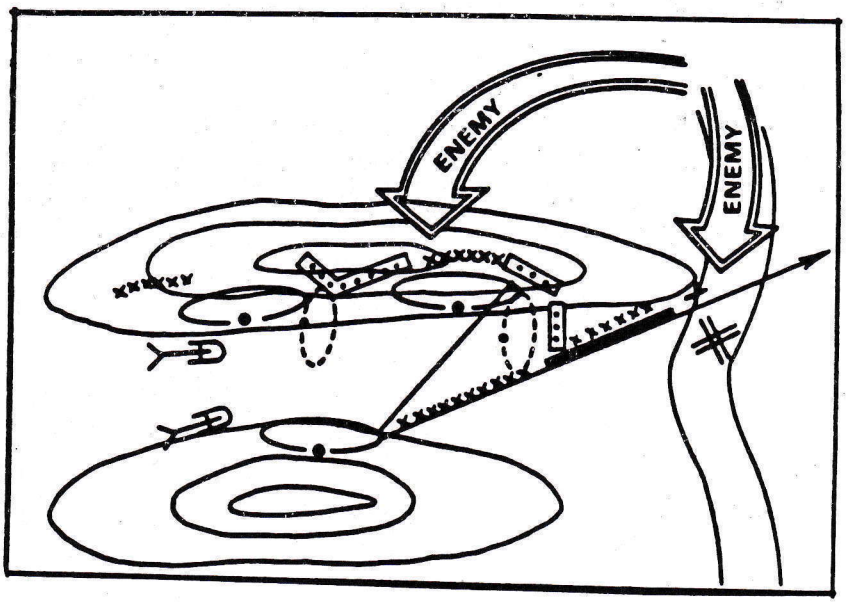


Fig 5-4. Reverse Slope Defense.

You may use a number of techniques on the reverse slope. You may deploy your men in line to allow a maximum number of men who can fire. The ambush nature of the reverse slope reduces the disadvantages of a linear deployment. You may have some of your men on the counterslope, (see figure 5-5) where they can fire down on the enemy once he crests. You may have a series of strong points, usually built around machineguns, on the reverse slope. Make these decisions according to the situation.

Strong Point Defense

Another type of defense which you can use in any area defense is a **strong point** defense. In this technique, you disperse your men in a number of fighting positions, usually designed for all-around defense. The idea is that even if the enemy penetrates, the strong points can keep fighting. Usually, the strong points are in depth, not in a line, although in a perimeter defense the depth may be less. Often, you will place strong points on pieces of terrain that make an enemy assault difficult.

The strong point is generally built around a crew-served weapon; a SAW or perhaps an attached weapon. A machinegun is commonly the basis of a strong point. This is not arbitrary. It is recognition of the fact that certain weapons tend to be decisive in the defense, the machinegun foremost among them. Anti-tank weapons may similarly be decisive. Therefore, you go to great efforts to site them well and also to protect them. One of the main tasks of your riflemen is to protect these weapons. Sometimes, you will keep some or all of them hidden, to open up only at the last moment, so the enemy does not find them and knock them out from long range.

The relationship among your strong points is important to the strength of your defense. You need to position the points carefully so that they reinforce and protect each other. You must think carefully about how their fields of fire will look from the enemy's perspective. You do not want to give him covered avenues of approach or allow him to knock out your strong points one by one because they cannot protect each other.

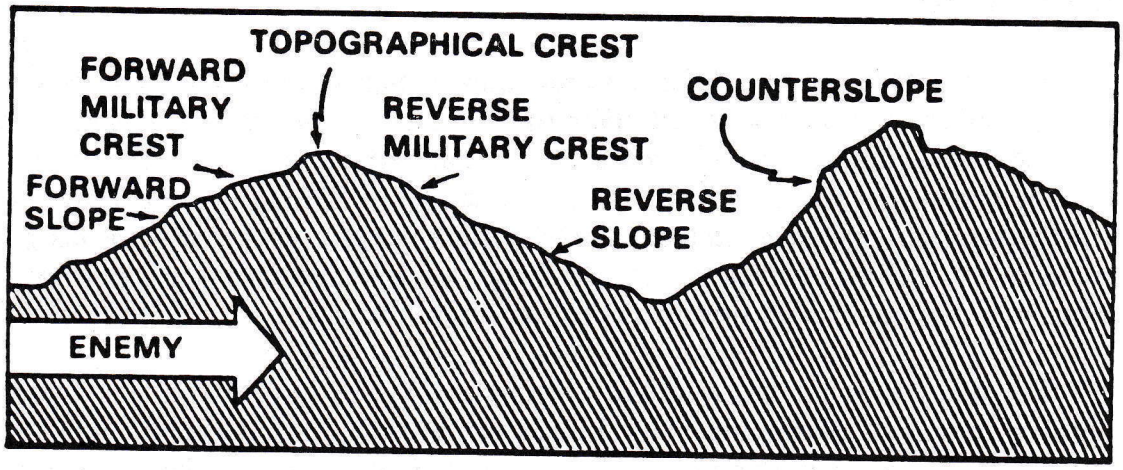


Fig 5-5. Terrain Profile.

You may arrange your strong points so that they channelize the enemy and suck him into a trap. Suddenly, concealed strong points may open fire behind him and cut off his retreat. Others may open fire into his flanks, perhaps just as he crests a hill and runs into a reverse slope defense. Then, you may counterattack into his rear. Each one of these techniques has an effect on the enemy. Individually they may only disrupt him, but if used together effectively they can destroy him.

A security screen is another important defensive technique. Unlike a reconnaissance screen, which orients on the enemy, a security screen focuses on your own force. It watches your flank, your front, or your rear to tell you where and when the enemy is coming and sometimes to delay him until you can respond, to gain you some time.

Again, all these techniques apply in all types of area defenses: focused, dispersed, and perimeter. In combat, situations are seldom pure. You are likely to use a mixture of focus in one place, dispersion in another, perhaps perimeter in a third, and even a line of outposts, which is useful if you think of it as a security screen and not the "line" of your defense.

CONCLUSION

To many Marines, the defense simply means digging in on the forward slope of a hill, and tying in with units on their right and left. This must change! Modern defenses are almost invariably area defenses that **invite** enemy penetration and then destroy him with a violent counterattack. As stated in FMFM 1, "*an effective defense must assume an offensive character, striking the enemy at the moment of his greatest vulnerability.*"[3] This concept must run through all defensive techniques at every level, from the Marine division down to the individual rifleman.

The defense is not just a way of keeping the enemy out of your rear areas; it is another means of destroying him. In modern warfare, the attack and the defense blend. The modern defense is an **active** defense. It canalizes the enemy's penetrations and destroys him with a counterattack.

To many Marines, these are new concepts. Are they new to you? Are area defense techniques part of **your** tactical repertoire? Or do you primarily use forward slope linear defense techniques? If so, you must change your defensive techniques to make them consistent with modern concepts for the defense.

Notes

1. Following the German example, the Allies similarly added depth to their defenses.
2. See also the articles on the reverse slope defense in Appendix A.
3. FMFM 1 *Warfighting*, p. 25.

Chapter Exercise

1. What are the central concepts that guide your thinking about defense on the modern battlefield?

2. Describe the basic techniques for the defense.

3. What are the advantages of using a reverse slope defense over a forward slope defense?

4. Describe a strong point defense.

Exercise Solution

1. Perhaps the most important concept is **defense in depth**. A modern defense does not hold a line; rather, it controls an area. Instead of trying to keep the enemy out of the defense area, it allows the enemy to penetrate and then uses the defense area to destroy him.

Second, the modern defense has the nature of an **ambush**. Modern defenses often have a network of ambushes throughout the defensive area. Many small teams, working without centralized control, ambush the enemy whenever and wherever they can.

Third, the **counterattack** is a central part of most modern defenses. The purpose of the counterattack is to destroy--kill or capture--the enemy attacker, not just to regain ground although it usually does that too.

Fourth, a modern defense is **invisible**. In this respect it also resembles an ambush. If your defense is visible, the enemy will smash it with firepower--artillery and air.

Fifth, the defense generally works **parallel** to the attack rather than across it. A good example is the Finnish"*motti*" defense in their war with the Soviet Union. The Soviet armored columns would penetrate deep into Finnish territory. The Finns would block the head of the column, then work all up and down its length with troops on skis. They cut the column up by attacking into it all along its length, reducing it to a chain of small pockets with no mutual support. (Another example is the horseshoe defense which was illustrated in *Tactical Fundamentals*.)

Finally, in an area defense, **firepower is used in ways that surprise and shock the enemy**. Generally, weapons hold their fire until the range is fairly short. Then everything opens up at once in a devastating storm of fire. The enemy not only suffers from the fire but from the shock effect. (See pages 121-124.)

2. Four basic techniques are: a focused defense, a dispersed defense, a perimeter defense and a linear defense.

A **focused** defense is where you intend to fight the enemy in one place within the defensive area. You may decide that the terrain, vegetation, habits of your enemy, etc., will lead him to a certain place where you can engage him advantageously. You then focus all your combat power on that area. For example, you may plan to hit him in that area from the front and both flanks with fire, then counterattack into his rear.

In a **dispersed** defense, you decide to engage the enemy throughout the defensive area. To do that, you disperse part or all of your force in small ambushes and/or positions. You may also use a counterattack, or a number of small counterattacks in this defense.

A **perimeter** defense is used where you must defend something, such as a fuel farm, some fixed target that is valuable. A perimeter defense surrounds the object you must protect, defending it from all sides. It must be dispersed to some extent. But depending on the situation, you may decide to focus it in sectors.

Finally, there is a **linear** defense, where you prevent the enemy from penetrating into your defense area. If he does penetrate, you counterattack with your reserve to drive him out. In general, the linear defense is useful only against weak opponents. (See pages 124-127.)

3. First, a reverse slope defense offers you more protection because it is less visible than a forward slope defense. The enemy doesn't locate you until he crests the hill and starts down the reverse slope. Also, he can't engage you with indirect fire as he advances, since he doesn't know where you are.

Second, the reverse slope defense has the nature of an ambush. You don't open up until the enemy enters your kill zone, and then you let him have it with everything at once. (See pages 126-128.)

4. In a **strong point** defense, you disperse your men in a number of fighting positions, usually designed for all-around defense. The idea is that even if the enemy penetrates, the strong points can keep fighting. Usually, the strong points are in depth, not in a line although in a perimeter defense the depth may be less. Often, you will place strong points on pieces of terrain that make an enemy assault difficult.

The strong point is generally built around a crew-served weapon, a SAW, machinegun, or perhaps an attached weapon because these weapons tend to be decisive in the defense. Anti-tank weapons may similarly be decisive. Therefore, you go to great efforts to site them well and also to protect them. Sometimes, you will keep some or all of them hidden, to open up only at the last moment, so the enemy does not find them and knock them out from long range.

The relationship among your strong points is important to the strength of your defense. You need to position the points carefully so that they reinforce and protect each other. You must think carefully about how their fields of fire will look from the enemy's perspective. You do not want to give him covered avenues of approach or allow him to knock out your strong points one by one because they cannot protect each other. (See page 128-130.)

CHAPTER 6

TEACHING TECHNIQUES

INTRODUCTION

How do you teach techniques? How do you make your unit highly proficient in techniques? The first and most important answer is **practice.** As you learned in Chapter One, techniques follow patterns. Therefore, techniques are things you can practice, reinforcing the pattern until everybody gets it right and can do it quickly and automatically.

There are many ways you can practice techniques. Some of them you can practice by themselves. You can go out and practice virtually any movement technique, doing it over and over until your unit gets it right. You can go out and set up ambushes, then critique them. You can do the same with a reverse slope or strong point defense.

Other techniques need an aggressor for you to practice on. For example, you need an aggressor to really practice an attack by infiltration. But even here, you can practice elements of the technique, such as making a penetration, without any formal field problem.

Of course, free-play training offers the best opportunity to practice techniques because you must make your techniques work against an enemy who is trying to counter them. That is similar to real war. A free-play exercise also helps you identify the techniques that you need to work on more.

In practicing techniques, your goal should be to make them automatic. This is something you see in veteran combat units. For example, if a veteran German infantry company fighting in the Soviet Union in World War II took fire from a village it was passing, all the company commander had to say was, "Combat in village." Everyone knew what to do. They knew because they had fought through so many villages that it was all second nature to them. They had all the techniques down so smoothly that every infantryman knew just what to do and how to do it. It had become automatic. It is harder to reach that level of performance in peacetime, but it should be your goal.

The example above illustrates another point about teaching techniques. While the techniques of fighting through a village were automatic, each village was usually different. The members of the company had also learned to adjust to that--to adjust their techniques to the specific situation.

You must teach your Marines to adapt their techniques, to adjust them to the situation. The battlefield is not a drill field, and each battlefield is somewhat different from every other battlefield.

Therefore, in teaching techniques, you must introduce variations in the nature of the problem. If you practice movement techniques, don't always go over the same ground. If you practice the assault by penetration, the positions you assault should not always be the same. As the leader, you must ensure this kind of variation. For a given technique, the situation should be of the same general kind, but different in its details as the specific situation or problem changes. That is how you teach adaptability.

A key point in teaching techniques is that the instruction must leave room for and encourage innovation. If a private or a sergeant comes up with a better way to get the same result, he should be rewarded for doing so, not punished. And you need to adopt and put into practice his innovation. Remember, modern techniques are not engraved on stone tablets. As a squad leader, platoon commander, or company commander, you have the latitude to adjust techniques, to throw out old ones and adopt new ones that work better. You will have to do that in combat. You will have to develop your own "bag of tricks." Similarly, you must give your subordinates the right to innovate.

TEACHING TECHNIQUES

These concepts--practice, adjusting techniques to the situation, and innovation--guide your training in techniques. What are some specific ways you can help apply them in your training?

First, and probably most important, you can create a good command climate. Do you encourage initiative and innovation? Are you patient with subordinates who try to be imaginative and innovative, even when what they come up with may not be very useful? Or do you humiliate them for falling short--thereby insuring that they will not make another attempt? Do you allow your subordinates to contribute, or do you direct everything yourself? Do you present them with problems and let them try to come up with techniques to solve them, or do you just teach "the answer," and demand that everyone follow it? Are you receptive when one of your Marines has a better idea than yours? Or do you "slam" him for embarrassing you?

Command climate must be the starting point for teaching adaptability and innovation in techniques. Of course, you can practice techniques even in a rigid, close-minded command climate. But your Marines will learn them as if they were still fighting in the 18th century: as rigid drill, which your men will do the same way regardless of the situation. On the battlefield, that can easily lead to disaster. Good, modern techniques--adapted to the situation and the enemy--can only be learned in a command atmosphere that rewards initiative, imagination, and innovation. Creating that kind of command climate is your first responsibility.

Second, you should strive to make your training as realistic and varied as possible. For you, that means a lot of hard work--work you can avoid if you are willing to do things "the same old way" every time. Good training in techniques will be hard work for you and your unit. Hardest for you may be the work involved in getting different ranges instead of always working over the same ground; getting permission to train differently from the way most of the units around you are probably training; setting up problems where the aggressor is equal or superior to you in numbers, instead of the usual token force; and simply dreaming up new problems that will force your Marines to adapt and innovate. Facing all this extra work when many of your colleagues are not doing it will be a test of your character.

The third training technique you can use is related to the second. You can and should make maximum use of free-play exercises. A free-play exercise is where you have two forces each doing everything they can to defeat the other. There is no scenario or script, just starting positions and missions. The best mission is usually, "destroy the opposing force." And the aggressor generally should not be a token force. The forces should be well-matched, with the aggressor sometimes superior in numbers.

Why is free-play training so important? Because tactics and the enemy have major effects on your techniques. Tactics can only exist in a free-play exercise; there are no tactical decisions to make in an exercise that follows a script. The free-play exercise also faces you with an enemy who, like an enemy in combat, has a free, independent will. He will try to figure out your techniques and turn them against you and to use techniques which you haven't seen used against you. Therefore, free-play training forces you to adapt your techniques to tactics and to the enemy, and to come up with new techniques. If you don't, you are likely to lose. In these respects, only free-play training can help you prepare for combat.

A fourth useful technique is to have an on-going competition within your unit to see who can come up with the best new techniques. You may want this competition to be informal, with rewards in the form of public praise, or even make it formal with symbolic prizes. You may want to focus it, e.g., set a week for competition on best ideas for making booby traps with a prize for the best three. You are likely to find you have some Marines who are highly innovative in one or another area where techniques apply. And the best idea can easily come from a PFC or lance corporal. When the other members of your unit see junior Marines rewarded for innovative techniques, such innovation will tend to become general throughout the unit.

RESPONSIBILITIES

As a leader, you have some special responsibilities in teaching techniques. You have already learned several, most importantly creating the right command climate within your unit.

Another responsibility that you bear is researching techniques. You should not be satisfied with only the techniques you are formally taught by the Marine Corps. Marines and soldiers of many nations have developed highly effective techniques, especially in wartime. You need to research them. This means reading military history, especially small-unit combat history and personal accounts of war and battle. These books can be a source for techniques of all sorts which you and your unit can use. Whenever you have an opportunity to work with army units or foreign units, they are also sources of new techniques. If you have worked with British units, you will have seen their superb field craft. Ask them to show you what they do and how they do it, and take whatever is useful for your own unit.

A good leader is never satisfied with merely what "the system" provides him. He goes beyond what is required. He has a genuine personal curiosity about military techniques, and he researches them on his own.

Once you have found a useful new technique, from research, from experimentation, or from the ideas of your subordinates, you have another responsibility: You must share it with other Marines. We are one Marine Corps, and no unit will win by itself on any battlefield. The techniques you discover that can help your Marines stay alive and win can help Marines in other units do the same. You owe it to them and to the Corps to share your knowledge. This is

especially vital in combat, but it is a habit you need to develop now.

There are many ways you can share ideas about techniques. You can do so informally, in conversation. You can do it in after-action reports. You can have regular meetings in your company or battalion to share ideas about techniques. You can even have a unit newsletter that you send to other units. You can share your discoveries with the whole Marine Corps by writing about them for the *Marine Corps Gazette* or *Leatherneck* magazines.

Of course, you should also ask fellow leaders to share their new techniques with you. It is false and dangerous pride to think you have all the answers. Just as you seek ideas about techniques from your subordinates, you should also seek them from your colleagues and your superiors.

Some Marines think that if a new technique is valid, it will be provided to them as "approved" by some formal Marine Corps agency. This is a wrong understanding of modern techniques. Of course, you will get some new techniques by this route. But you should not depend on it alone. Even less should you ignore new techniques because they did not come to you by some formal route, in a school or a Marine Corps publication. Modern techniques change too fast for any formal system to keep up with all of them. Nor can any formal system hope to have all the "bright ideas." You need to be open to all possible sources of new and effective techniques. In fact, you need to be more than open; you need to seek them. A Marine leader is never passive in meeting any of his responsibilities.

Chapter Exercise

1. To effectively train your unit in techniques, what are some things you should do?

2. As a leader, what are your responsibilities in teaching techniques?

Exercise Solution

1. First, and probably most important, you should create a good command climate. You must encourage initiative and innovation. You must be patient with subordinates who try to be imaginative and innovative, even when what they come up with may not be very useful. You must allow your subordinates to contribute, to draw on their experience and expertise as well as your own. A good command climate is the starting point for teaching adaptability and innovation in techniques.

Second, you should strive to make your training as realistic and varied as possible. Good training in techniques will be hard work, for your unit and especially for you. Hardest for you may be the work involved in getting different ranges instead of always working over the same ground; getting permission to train differently from the way most of the units around you are probably training; setting up problems where the aggressor is equal or superior to you in numbers, instead of the usual token force; and simply dreaming up new problems that will force your Marines to adapt and innovate.

Third, you can and should make maximum use of free-play exercises. Free-play training is so important because tactics and the enemy have major effects on your techniques. Tactics can only exist in a free-play exercise; there are no tactical decisions to make in an exercise that follows a script. Free-play training forces you to adapt your techniques to tactics and to the enemy, and to come up with new techniques.

Fourth, you can use competition within your unit to see who can come up with the best new techniques. Since Marines are competitive by nature, healthy competition is an effective way to generate enthusiasm and innovative techniques. (See pages 144-146.)

2. First, you must create the right command climate, one that encourages initiative, innovation, and allows subordinates to contribute their ideas. This is your most important responsibility.

Second, you must research techniques. You should not be satisfied with only the techniques you are formally taught by the Marine Corps. Marines and soldiers of many nations have developed highly effective techniques, especially in wartime. You need to research them. This means reading military history, especially small-unit

combat history and personal accounts of war and battle. This also means that you seek ideas and techniques from other units, whether they be Marine, U. S. Army, or foreign units.

Third, once you have found a useful new technique, you must share it with other Marines. The techniques you discover that can help your Marines stay alive and win can help Marines in other units do the same. You owe it to them and to the Corps to share your knowledge. This is especially vital in combat. (See pages 146-147.)

COURSE EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Combat Techniques MCI-7403 (1991)

To improve this course, please complete and return this questionnaire to MCI. If you answer "no" to any of the questions, please explain your answer. Include recommendations to improve this course, as appropriate.

1. Do you feel the purpose of this course was fulfilled?

2. Did the text present the material clearly? Were the examples helpful?

3. Was the level of instruction appropriate to your grade and MOS?

4. Did each chapter exercise adequately prepare you for the exam?

5. Did the exam adequately measure your understanding of the course? Was the method of testing effective?

6. Additional comments or recommendations. Please be specific.

How many hours did it take for you to complete the course?_____

Please provide the following:

1. Rank:
2. MOS:
3. Current Assignment:

If you have an administrative problem, please use the Student Request/Inquiry Form (MCI R-11K) provided.

Annex A

Selected Articles

Article	Page
Effective Op Orders, by Captain John L. Buckheit, (*Armor*, Jan-Feb 1990), Reproduced Courtesy of *Armor* Magazine.	151
Attack on a Fortified Area: Lessons From the Past, by Maj Jack Klimp, (*Marine Corps Gazette*, June, 1982), Reproduced courtesy of *Marine Corps Gazette* Magazine.	153
No Place to Hide, by Maj Thomas X. Hammes, (*Marine Corps Gazette*, July, 1987), Reproduced courtesy of *Marine Corps Gazette* Magazine.	159
Critiquing 'No Place to Hide,' (*Marine Corps Gazette*, October, 1987), Reproduced courtesy of *Marine Corps Gazette* Magazine.	167
The Reverse Slope Defense, by Col Michael D. Wyly, (*Marine Corps Gazette*, October, 1987), Reproduced courtesy of *Marine Corps Gazette* Magazine.	169

Effective Op Orders

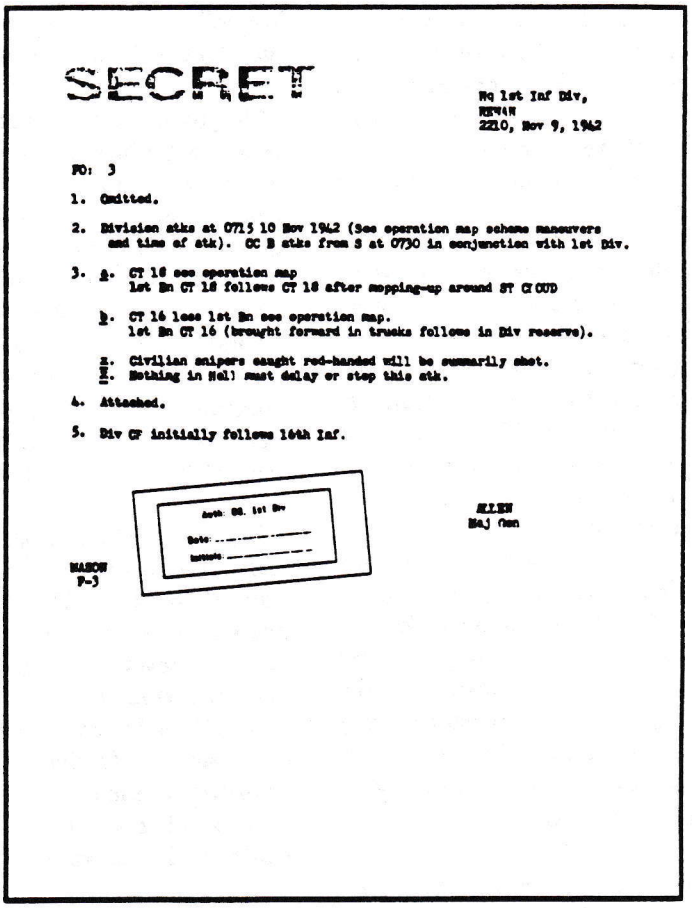
by Captain John L. Buckheit

The operations order (OPORD) is an important tool for the Army officer at any level. OPORDs direct our efforts in war as well as in peace. We learn to write the five-paragraph OPORD in Army schools at all levels. Then, we refine our skills during training exercises and much of our normal day-to-day business. But, are we learning to write and use the type of OPORDs needed to win on a modern battlefield?

OPORDs are a controversial subject. Almost all officers have written at least one, and each has his own particular style. Officers love to discuss the merits and flaws of different types of OPORDs. I have argued about OPORDs in both the basic and advanced courses, at the club, in officer professional development classes, and at ARTEP after-action reports. Through debate after debate, one criticism remains constant: the typical operations order at the battalion or company level is too long and unwieldy.

During World War I, American division-level attack orders were often 20-pages long. In the 1920s, battalion orders at the Infantry School were three or four pages in length. General Marshall criticized this as excessive. Studying German Army maneuvers during the 1930s, General Marshall learned that the Germans relied on brief orders, often only oral, up to the division level. During the Louisiana manuevers of 1940, he succeeded in cutting the division order down to a simple statement based on the five-paragraph field order. Battalion- and company-level orders were no longer than a page, and often oral. When the 1st Infantry Division attacked Oran, during the North African Campaign, the OPORD was only a page long, with accompanying graphics.

Through World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War most units relied on oral OPORDs. Written orders were drawn up after the fact for historical purposes. The demands of combat did not allow sufficient time to draft and distribute lengthy orders. Commanders personally briefed subordinates on their intent whenever possible. At times, assistant S3s simply delivered graphics with the scheme of maneuver and a brief written order. This written order supplemented,



SECRET

Hq 1st Inf Div,
[illegible]
2210, Nov 9, 1942

FO: 3

1. Omitted.

2. Division atks at 0715 10 Nov 1942 (See operation map scheme maneuvers and time of atk). CC B atks from S at 0730 in conjunction with 1st Div.

3. a. CT 18 see operation map
1st Bn CT 18 follows CT 18 after mopping-up around ST CLOUD

b. CT 16 less 1st Bn see operation map.
1st Bn CT 16 (brought forward in trucks follows in Div reserve).

c. Civilian snipers caught red-handed will be summarily shot.
d. Nothing in Hell must delay or stop this atk.

4. Attached.

5. Div CP initially follows 16th Inf.

Auth: CG, 1st Div
Date: _____
Initials: _____

ALLEN
Maj Gen

MASON
P-3

Reproduction of the terse five-paragraph field order issued by MG Terry Allen to men of the 1st Infantry Division prior to the attack on Oran, North Africa, in 1942. The order is from the files of the First Division Museum - Cantigny, Wheaton, Ill.

"When we write OPORDs for a grade, we write as much as possible in order to demonstrate our competence. We learn this at service schools, and it follows us to service with units."

and did not repeat, the graphics. A well-trained unit with sound standard operating procedures could efficiently operate in this manner.

Unfortunately, we have lost some of these skills. All too often, modern battalions depend on lengthy written orders. Much of the information is redundant or restates the obvious. Staffs are taxed to produce these verbose documents, but subordinate commanders seldom read the entire order. Long orders briefings waste valuable time. Painfully detailed OPORDs cannot compensate for a poorly-trained unit. Dynamic plans become flat. Afterward, some commanders will need to personally review crucial points with key personnel. The system is inefficient and robs units of flexibility.

Why do units operate this way? Some officers respond that in wartime, they'd do it differently. That logic defeats the purpose of training. We need to review our training. Officers write OPORDs in three situations. Army schools, specifically the basic and advanced courses, instruct and grade us on writing orders. Then, we write orders for grade or critique during training exercises. Finally, we write orders to accomplish our day-to-day business in the field and garrison. Of the three, the third circumstance may be the best training. That is the *only instance* where we routinely write only what we need.

I am not criticizing the five-paragraph field order. The format is logical and designed to avoid accidentally omitting anything. Any reader knows where to look for whatever information he seeks. But too often, we abuse this format by providing excessive information. When we write OPORDs for a grade, we write as much as possible in order to demonstrate our competence. We learn this at service schools, and it follows us to service with units. Also, commanders give in to the temptation to micromanage through finely detailed OPORDs. Unfortunately, such orders will not suffice during the next conflict.

Throughout the Army, we need to stress the concise OPORDs that will be efficient tools in time of war. We will only be combat ready when such OPORDs become the norm.

The basic and advanced courses must teach officers to write this type of OPORD. Small-group instruction lends itself to writing a lot of OPORDs. Obviously, we must start by teaching long written orders. The Armor Officer Advanced Course does so. Also, it stresses mission-oriented orders with a solid commander's intent. Students write battalion OPORDs and brief company OPORDs for a grade.

This is a solid base, but it is only a start. Instructors normally grade with a checklist. This tempts students to be as verbose as possible in order to cover everything. To combat this, students should have to write OPORDs under extreme time constraints, forcing them to prioritize information. Then, instructors could critique what was included and what was not.

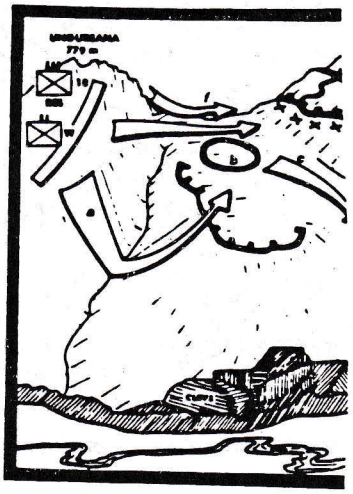
Also, the instruction should stress OPORDs consisting solely of operations graphics with brief instructions. This would train students in the type of orders that have worked in wartime.

Commanders at all levels must implement sound standard operating procedures. This will allow for more streamlined OPORDs. The two must complement one another in an efficient system. Then, commanders must use brief OPORDs during field exercises, so that units can become accustomed to them. Also, they must encourage subordinates to use brief OPORDs. Obviously, micro-management does not create the necessary environment.

Finally, all officers should use the OPORD format whenever possible during day-to-day business. This constant practice will teach officers to become terse. Like any other skill, writing OPORDs requires constant practice. Once we start doing this, we will institutionalize a concept that has worked for our Army in three major conflicts.

Captain John L. Buckheit graduated from USMA in 1984 and received an Infantry commission. After attending the Infantry Officer Basic Course, he served with 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry, 1st ID (F) in the FRG. He was successively assigned as rifle platoon leader, company XO, battalion support platoon leader, and assistant S3. After attending the Armor Officer Advanced Course and the Cavalry Leaders' Course, he was selected for the Funded Legal Education Program. He is currently attending the Columbia University School of Law.

Attack on a Fortified Area: Lessons From the Past



Attack by Wurttemberg Mountain Battalion against Rumanian fortified positions, 9 Aug 1917.

by Maj Jack Klimp

The tactics and associated maxims developed by a young German infantry officer in World War I are deserving of close study by today's commanders.

The study of military history is important to all military men. As noted by several recent GAZETTE authors, it augments both the experiences gained on FMF tours and the knowledge obtained through the study of doctrine by providing a broad experiential base in tactics, techniques, and strategic thought. It thus helps the combat commander develop a combat instinct, an ability to analyze his situation and to take appropriate and timely action.

Rommel's Maxims (GAZETTE, Oct81) by Col R.R. Jespersen illustrates the value of history to the modern commander. In his article Col Jespersen lists the following maxims attributed to Field Marshal Erwin Rommel:

1. Attack, attack, attack.
2. Always support infantry attacks by fire, no matter how small the caliber or how few the weapons.
3. An inferior number can overwhelm a superior number through a greater use of automatic weapons or merely through firing more rapidly.
4. Always place automatic weapons well forward, either in attack or defense.
5. He wins who fires first and can deliver the heaviest focused fire.
6. Whenever possible, use deception.
7. In all attacks, include the psychological factors (instill fear in the enemy).
8. All combined attacks must be synchronized in the most simple manner.
9. Whenever possible use smoke to mask movement during daylight.
10. Whenever your troops are resting, perform reconnaissance.
11. Always use security elements, in either attack or defense.
12. Troops must learn to move silently.
13. Whenever troops have stopped in place for more than a break, they should improve their position, i.e., dig in.
14. The stronger the fire, the deeper the entrenching, the fewer the number of lives lost.
15. The combat leader must be both active and resolute.
16. Attack, attack, attack.

Few people realize that Rommel developed these maxims, not as a commander of tremendous armored forces in World War II, but rather as an infantry lieutenant with the Wurttemberg Mountain Battalion in World War I. They resulted from tactics he perfected for infantry assaults on fortified positions. They were the same basic tactics he later used so effectively in Africa.

His methods were distinguished by the organization of his unit into three elements (a suppression element, an assault element, and an exploitation element) and by the masterful

Examples of Rommel's Infantry Battles in 1917

Date	Place	Size Force	Suppression Element	Assault Element	Exploitation Element	Ratio Support to Assault
1/7/17	Gagesti Rumania	1 rifle co. 1 MG plt.	1 rifle plt. 1 MG plt.	1 rifle plt.	1 rifle plt.	2 to 1*
8/10/17	Carpathians	3 rifle cos. 2 MG cos.	1 MG co.	2 rifle plts.	2 rifle cos. 1 MG co.	3 to 2
8/11/17	Carpathians	3 rifle cos. 2 MG cos.	1 MG co.	1 rifle plt. 1 rifle sqd.	2½ rifle cos. 1 MG co.	3 to 1
8/19/17	Carpathians	3 rifle cos. 2 MG cos.	1 MG co.	1 rifle sqd.	2⅓ rifle cos. 1 MG co.	9 to 1
8/25/17	NE Italy	3 rifle cos. 3 MG cos.	1 MG co. 6 light MGs	4 rifle sqds.	2⅓ rifle cos. 2 MG cos.	4 to 1

* One MG platoon equals one rifle platoon (a conservative estimate of MG effectiveness).

NOTE: This table is taken from Gen W.E. DePuy's excellent article *One-Up and Two-Back*, which appeared in the Jan80 issue of *Army*.

Table 1

use of the direct fires of the suppression element to gain nearly total fire superiority over his foe in a narrow sector. This suppressive fire enabled his assault force to "go in virtually standing up" to effect the breakthrough and to then split laterally to widen and secure the breach. This accomplished, the exploitation force then rushed through the gap and either reduced the position from the rear or seized deeper objectives.

Of his three functional elements, the exploitation element was the largest; the assault element, the smallest. As he gained experience, Rommel decreased still further the size of his assault element. At one point it consisted of only one squad. The development of his organizational and tactical concept is illustrated by Table 1.

These tactics and associated maxims, developed by Rommel in World War I, are applicable today. Perhaps the best way to illustrate this is by posing a modern tactical problem. Suppose a Marine amphibious brigade (MAB) is preparing to conduct a deliberate attack and is faced with a fortified position within its sector. It has been decided that a battalion, currently employed in the rear of the MAB's zone, will be assigned the mission of securing the position. Let's assume this battalion is organized in accordance with the new structure for the 1980s as discussed in the Jan82 GAZETTE and reinforced as shown in Figure 1.

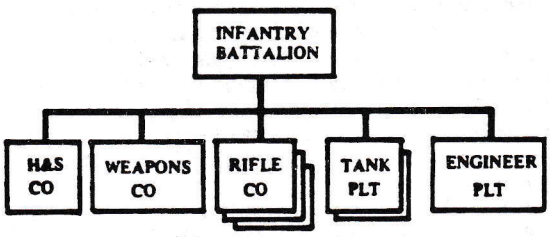


Figure 1

The battalion's S-2 has provided a sketch of the enemy position (Figure 2). The enemy force is a motorized rifle company reinforced by a tank platoon. It is at about 70 percent strength. Some of its positions are 50 percent completed while others are alternate or "dummy positions," designed to create the impression of a much stronger defense. Some positions have been provided with overhead cover. Communication trenches connect the three main trenches, portions of which are well camouflaged. Observation posts and antiarmor ambushes have been detected forward of the position.

How could our battalion, provided with close air support missions and supporting artillery, successfully attack this position by applying Rommel's tactics and maxims?

Reconnaissance. Following Rommel's example, one of the first steps taken should be a reconnaissance by the battalion commander and his subordinate leaders. In his book, *Infantry Attacks*, Rommel describes such a reconnaissance:

> Sharp observation of hostile territory yielded excellent results during the night of August 10 and in the first hours of the morning. The forward hostile installations and the behavior of the garrison was accurately ascertained.

Today, we have an advantage over Rommel in that we can call upon assets never dreamed of in his day. Detailed maps, night observation devices, ground surveillance radars, and aerial imagery are just a few examples. None of these, however, can substitute for a close personal reconnaissance by the commanders who will lead the attack.

Organization for Combat. Once the disposition of the enemy force has been ascertained, the commander begins to organize his force for the assault. Following Rommel's lead, the battalion is organized into the three elements described earlier. In this case, the assault element consists of a rifle squad reinforced by a squad of engineers and an assault squad. Under the leadership of the battalion's best platoon commander, its job is to open and hold a narrow penetration through which the exploitation force can attack.

The suppression element consists of the weapons company, portions of the weapons platoons of the rifle companies, and the two tank platoons. Under the command of the weapons company commander, and with the support of artillery, air, and naval gunfire, this element's job is to hold the enemy within his positions while the assault element effects the penetration. It must open a narrow fire-free passage or channel within which the assault force will work. The commander of the suppression element must coordinate closely with the assault force leader to ensure close and continuous support throughout the assault. Rommel describes this team work in his book:

> The 3d Company assault team covered the hundred yards to the southwest corner of the woods amid a deafening roar and was partially concealed by the smokey haze which rose from the explosion of many hand grenades. The heavy machine-gun companies had given the enemy a good work-out, and I ordered them to shift their fire to the right and left and make a narrow fire-free path for the assault team which moved silently forward firmly determined to turn in a complete job.

The exploitation element consists of the remainder of the battalion. Its job is to follow closely behind the assault element and rush through the penetration, splitting left and right to destroy the enemy from the rear. Since Soviet-style doctrine emphasizes control of the trenchline as vital to the overall defense, immediate local counterattacks can be expected. The exploitation force must be prepared to defeat these actions, and as necessary, assist in holding the shoulders of the penetration.

Detailed Preparation. This attack on a well-fortified position must not be conducted in haste. Rommel reflected the necessity for close, detailed preparation when he wrote:

> The preparations were tiresome and time consuming. During the forenoon I personally concealed ten heavy machine guns, moving them into their positions by wide detours, so as to avoid hostile observation. Some were emplaced on the wooded crest of the heights close behind our forward line and the remainder were in the rills and folds of the south slope. I assigned targets to each gun and planned the fire schedules to be followed before, during, and after the attack. I set the opening of fire for 1200 and designated the platoon located nearest the ridge road bend as the base platoon.

The preparations, conducted under radio silence, begin during the hours of darkness. Enemy observation posts are located and destroyed. Firing positions are prepared. Sectors of fire and targets are assigned. Weapons systems are brought forward and positioned, and initial breaching of the enemy's obstacles by the engineers is effected. Additionally, the assault element and the exploitation element are brought forward to their attack positions. Artillery, firing various types of ordnance, helps cover these activities, wears down the resistance and morale of the defender, and keeps him off balance.

Once more, following Rommel's example, the battalion commander is personally involved in the preparations. He supervises the positioning of suppression weapons. He checks on the assignment of sectors of fire and specific targets within each sector. He supervises the construction of primary and alternate firing positions and observes the rehearsal of movement between them.

Conduct of the Assault. As daylight and the time of the assault approaches, the volume of artillery fire increases and the preparation fires

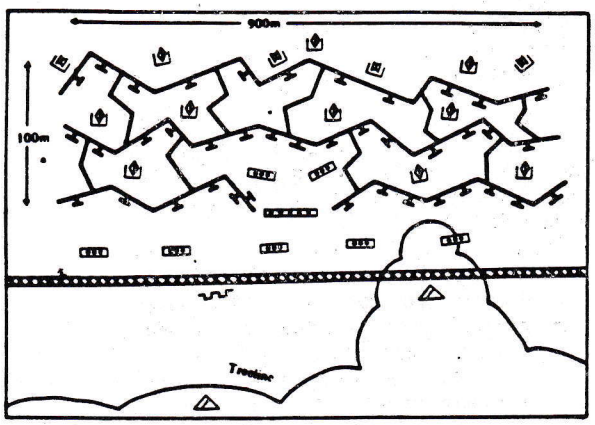


Figure 2

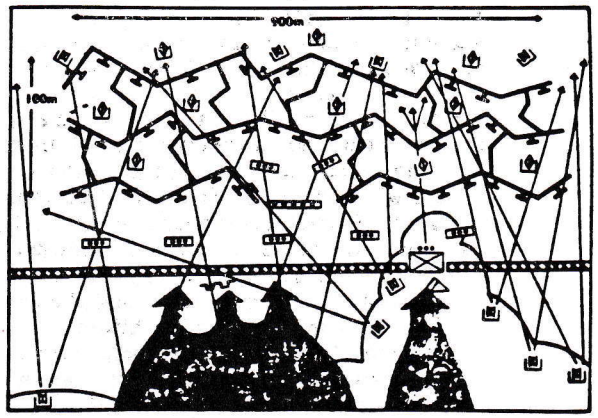
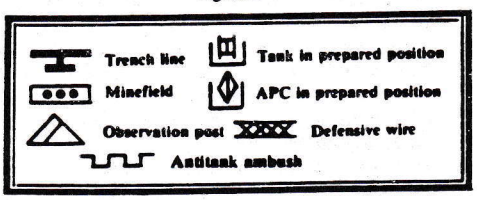


Figure 3

Suppression Element fires suppressive fires and conducts supporting attack
Assault Element begins penetration
Exploitation Element follows



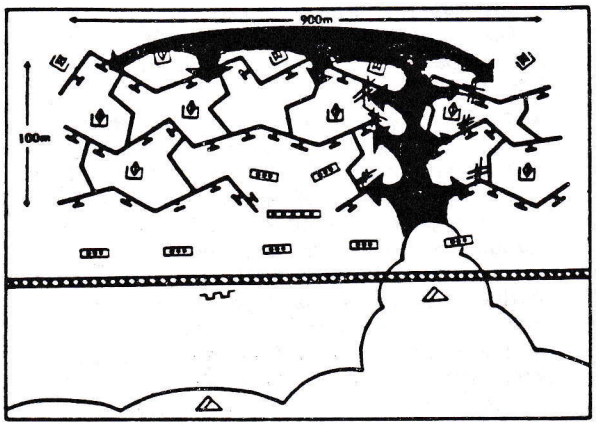


Figure 4

Exploitation Element widens and holds shoulders of penetration against counterattacks—fans out and begins destruction of position.

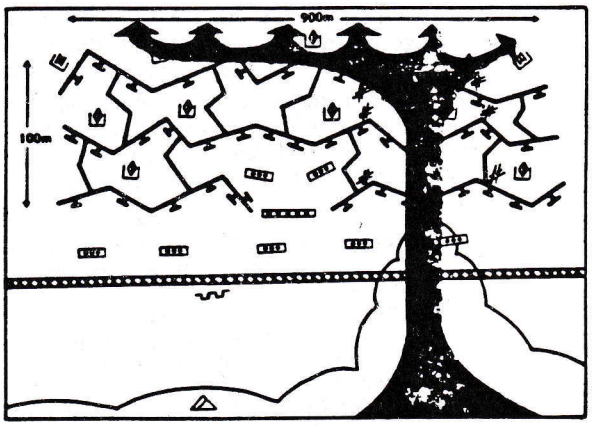


Figure 5

Suppressive Element rushes through penetration and takes up defensive positions to the rear of the position.

on predesignated targets begin. Under the cover of these fires, the assault element moves forward through the outer bands of enemy obstacles, along paths cleared the night before.

As daylight breaks, and on a preplanned time schedule, the artillery fire ceases or shifts to allow the preplanned air strikes to come in. These strikes deliver mixed types of ordnance, the majority being general-purpose bombs and fire bombs. Laser guided bombs as well as Maverick missiles may be used against identified tanks or personnel carriers. The aim at this point is to destroy as many as possible of the previously identified bunkers, tanks, and armored vehicles.

As the preplanned air strikes cease, the artillery again shifts its fires, this time to support the forward movement of the assault element. Simultaneously, the suppression element commences firing and creates a narrow channel for

the assault element to work in. The MK19 40mm and/or .50caliber machineguns of the weapons company engage primarily bunkers and armored vehicles. The medium machineguns of the weapons platoons of the rifle companies engage the firing slits of the enemy bunkers and infantry in trenches. Mortars from the weapons company and weapons platoons are likewise employed. Tanks and Dragons engage enemy tanks and armored vehicles. All this activity is designed to keep the enemy pinned in his positions and to prevent him from interfering with the efforts of the assault force.

In his book Rommel describes this action:

> The coordinated use of artillery, mortars, and heavy machine guns was the result of prior planning. The mortar company nailed the enemy down at the breakthrough site even before the artillery preparation and allowed Fridel's assault squad to cut a path through the wire. Artillery fire on the first position forced the enemy to cover during the breakthrough by the Rommel detachment while a machine gun and a platoon of the 5th Company fired on the enemy outside the breakthrough area and prevented him from interfering with operations.

As the suppressive fires build to a crescendo, a portion of the suppression element is employed on the left flank to help draw the enemy's attention away from the actual penetration area. It is used to conduct a feint, demonstration, display, or ruse. Whatever technique is employed, the goals remain the same: to deceive the enemy as to the true location of the penetration, to keep the enemy off balance, and to establish a high tempo of events intended to overload the enemy commander's decision-making process. Rommel again describes such an action:

> The feint one hundred yards to the left of the breakthrough point delivered from complete concealment with hand grenades and shouting was to draw the defensive fire of the enemy in the oak woods in a false direction and to bring about the premature commitment of reserves. It fully achieved its purpose in helping the assault team forward, without producing any losses.

Capitalizing on the reduced visibility, confusion, deception, and disorganization created by these actions, the assault element begins moving forward. Using the cover and concealment provided by the terrain and the suppressive element's fires, it quickly creates a narrow but clear channel for the exploitation element to follow (Figure 3). Rommel describes such an assault element at work:

> The assault team forced its way into the oak woods and found it had to clear the enemy trenches, a job which our mountain infantry made quick work of. Whenever progress in the trenches was denied them, they left their covered approach and enveloped the local strongpoint.

Following closely behind the assault element, the exploitation element, anxious to penetrate the enemy position as quickly as possible, moves rapidly to attack any positions along the penetration route required to broaden it or to hold its shoulders. They also move to block any local counterattacks that develop (Figure 4).

Following Rommel's example, the exploitation force is led by the battalion commander. From this point, he can exercise control over all three elements of his force and is in a position to affect directly the outcome of the fight. Rommel describes his own involvement:

> Fridel's assault squad was to attack down the path through the wire, break into the position and block off both shoulders of the penetration. I was to follow on Fridel's heels with the rest of the 5th Company, Lieutenant Leuze's heavy machine gun platoon, and the remaining units of my detachment.

As the exploitation element completes the breakthrough and fans out in the rear of the enemy position to go about its destructive work, the suppression element rushes through the breach and takes up positions on the first piece of defensible terrain to the rear of the enemy positions. From there it prevents any enemy reserves from interfering with the efforts of the exploitation element until the attack is completed and the position is consolidated (Figure 5).

Much can be learned from Rommel's experiences. His successes emphasize the importance of gaining the initiative through a determined attack, of using supporting fires properly, of deceiving the enemy, of conducting a personal reconnaissance, of organizing properly for combat, of planning and preparing thoroughly, and of influencing the outcome by the commander's personal supervision at the key times and places.

In short, we can learn from history. The Marine who ignores history severely limits himself. Short FMF tours coupled with the study of presently accepted doctrine cannot provide the broad experience that enables a leader to analyze his situation instinctively. The study of history offers a limitless source of tactical experience and knowledge from which the professional can draw. Successful soldiers of the past can teach valuable lessons to us today. In the words of former President Harry S. Truman, "The only thing new in the world is the history you don't know." USMC

No Place To Hide

by Maj Thomas X. Hammes

The enemy's ability, through the use of thermal imagery, to see clearly through smoke or darkness can completely change the balance of forces.

Scene One: May 1940. The "phony war" continues. Senior French and British commanders are smugly confident that if the Germans attack, the Allied forces will move rapidly to stop them. Not only do the Allies have the Maginot Line, but their armies outnumber the Germans and have better tanks, artillery, and aircraft. The outcome is obvious.

On 10 May, the phony peace is shattered by the German onslaught. Less than one month later, the French army is smashed and the British expeditionary force is desperately trying to evacuate Dunkirk. The German Panzer divisions have swept all opposition aside.

Scene Two: 6 October 1973. The Egyptian Army, in a stunning coup, has swarmed across the Suez Canal, destroyed the Bar-Lev line, and rapidly built up its combat power in the Sinai. Although caught unprepared, the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) is mobilizing, confident that the arrival of its vaunted tank forces will quickly turn the tide.

After two days of intense fighting and local counterattacks, the IDF Southern Command orders a divisional counterattack. The Israeli tank battalions respond with their patented full speed attack, expecting once again to scatter Egyptian resistance.

By nightfall 8 October, the unsupported tank battalions have lost over 200 tanks to the Egyptian's integrated defense of tanks and wire-guided missiles. Although suffering grievously, the Israelis have gained no ground. Disaster is looming. It will be prevented only by exceptional sacrifice.

Scene Three: 6 June 1982. Israel hurls its forces across the Lebanese border. Rapid gains are recorded in all areas except the southern end of the Bekka Valley, which is held in strength by the Syrian Army. Political restraints have prevented the IDF from attacking in this sensitive area.

While the IDF waits for the go-ahead, the Syrians move up more surface-to-air missile (SAM) batteries. Syrian commanders are confident the air defense umbrella will stymie the Israeli Air Force much as it had in 1973.

On 9 June, the IDF gets the go-ahead. Operations commence with precision airstrikes by the Israeli Air Force. Using electronic countermeasures (ECM) equipment, drones, and new tactics, the Israelis smash the Syrian air defenses, destroying 17 of 19 SAM batteries and shooting down 29 MiGs. Air supremacy is established and the Israeli ground forces are free to roll forward.

Scene Four: October 1988. A U.S. Marine Corps mechanized combined arms task force (MCATF) is poised to commence its attack on a Soviet stronghold. The rapid buildup of combat power in response to the Soviet invasion of Iran has justified the Corps' extensive investment in pre-positioned equipment.

The Marine commander watches with growing confidence as the prep fires are delivered exactly according to schedule. All maneuver units report readiness to cross the line of departure (LD). A-4 smoke birds conduct a perfect mission placing smoke precisely between the LD and the objective. All enemy positions are completely obscured. The MCATF's lead elements lunge across the LD.

As the maneuver forces deploy, a wave of wire-guided missiles appears through the smoke. Numerous vehicles are hit. Marines fire blindly into the smoke, desperately hoping to suppress the enemy. More missiles appear through the haze. The MCATF's leading elements are virtually destroyed, unable to respond to the unseen enemy. The assault elements are sent reeling back to the LD, decimated.

What do these scenarios have in common?

Obviously, the first three are historical fact, while the last is pure speculation. However, there is a common thread that runs through all four. That thread is the failure of the defeated force to recognize the impact that *existing* technology would have on the outcome of the battle. In each case, the decisive factor was the intelligent application of widely available equipment that would not have been decisive if the losers had understood its potential.

In 1940, the Germans tied together the strengths of air and armor in a new and devastating fashion. In 1973, the Egyptians applied new tactics to weapons (wire-guided missiles) that had existed for years. In 1983, the Israelis made use of drone aircraft and ECM equipment—items available to both sides. Finally, in the hypothetical example, the Soviets make use of thermal sights (items now widely available) to destroy a force unprepared to deal with the changing conditions of the modern battlefield.

While the last scenario is fiction, it has an alarming potential for becoming reality. Consider that the MCATF commander prepared and executed his attack according to the methods he learned during combined arms exercises (CAXs) at Twentynine Palms. Extensive suppressive fires were used, followed by precisely delivered smoke, to allow the assault elements to close with the enemy.

What the MCATF commander failed to consider was the presence of thermal imagery and its effect on the outcome of the battle. The enemy's ability to see clearly through the "obscuring" smoke completely changed the balance of forces. Once again, one side failed to understand the impact of available equipment on the outcome, and it paid the price.

Thermal imagery equipment is not new to the tactical environment. Beginning with the early infrared devices and progressing rapidly to today's highly capable equipment, it has changed the battlefield considerably. Yet the Marine Corps as an institution has not responded to that change. Before we can correct this deficiency, we must first understand how these devices have changed the battlefield.

First, night no longer conceals. The combination of modern thermal devices combined with the wide variety of available crew-served night sights and night vision devices destroyed the cloak of darkness. (See Figure 1.)

Second, this loss of concealment applies in both the offense and the defense. We can no longer

Photo of a vehicle and troops taken through a thermal viewer on a moonless night.

Figure 1

A composite photo of camouflaged troops—upper right portion taken through a normal camera lens; lower left portion taken through a thermal viewer. Note how the figures in the lower left half of the picture clearly stand out. In contrast, while their camouflage is the same, it is difficult to pick out the two figures in the upper right half of the photo.

Figure 2

Another composite photo taken through a smoke screen. Despite the thick smoke, the thermal viewer makes identification of a tracked vehicle easy.

Figure 3

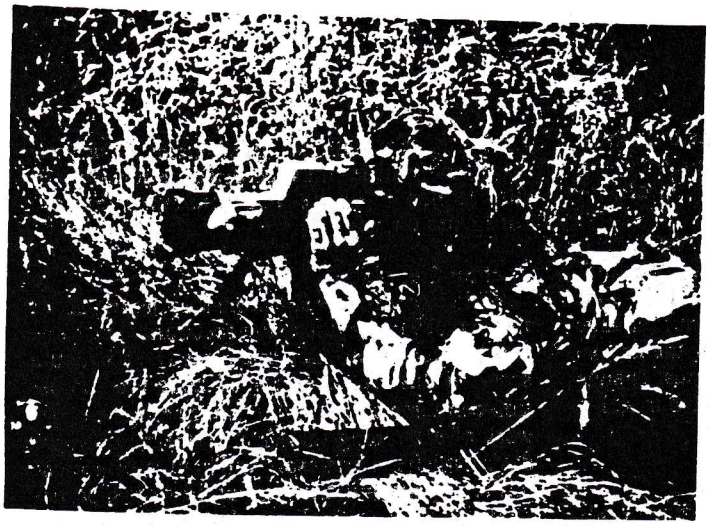
count on achieving surprise by building well-camouflaged positions or making maximum use of concealment in movement. (See Figures 2 and 3.)

Third, more than ever the rule is "If you can be seen you can be hit; if hit you can be killed." In fact, we must now modify this rule to read: "If you are in his line of sight, you can be seen; if seen, hit; if hit, killed."

Thus, all of our concepts concerning the value of concealment and the tactics derived from those concepts must be reevaluated.

Having grasped the effect of thermals, we must next understand the degree to which they have proliferated on the battlefield. Looking at friendly forces only, the following thermal sights are available:

- Every M1 tank has a thermal imagery device.
- Every M2/M3 infantry fighting vehicle has a



A British soldier using a lightweight (11 pounds), hand-held thermal viewer.

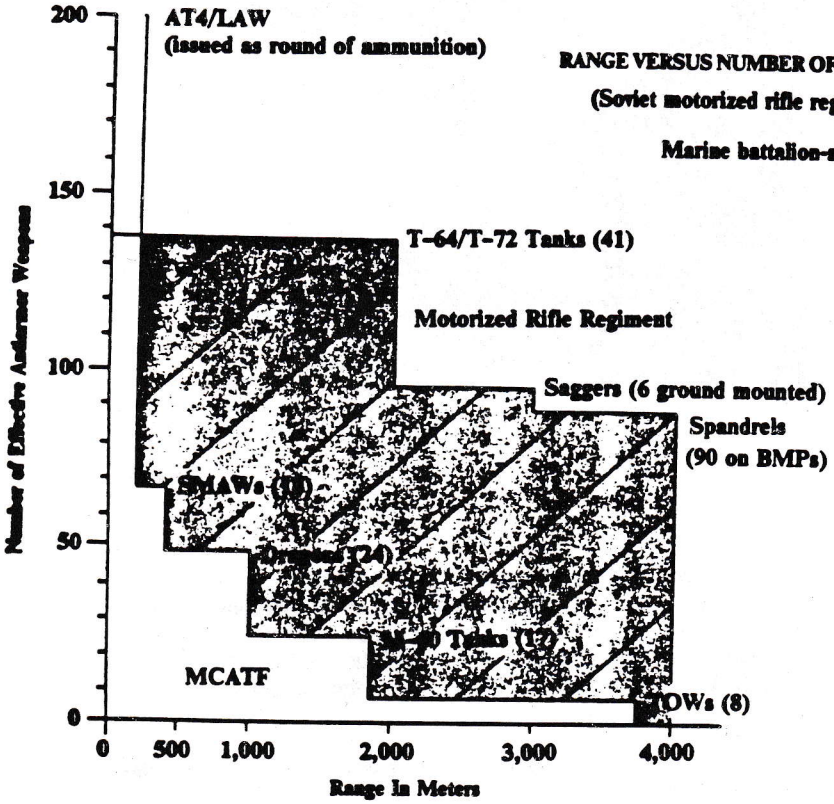
Figure 4

thermal sight.

- Every TOW weapons system has a thermal sight.
- More than 50 percent of the Dragon trackers are thermal devices.
- The British Army is in the process of equipping every platoon commander with a hand held thermal device. (See Figure 4.)

Therefore, the prudent commander must assume that with this number of devices in service with Allied forces, any potential enemy, equipped by the Soviet Union, will also have them available.

To compound the problem, there is a great disparity between the number of long-range antiarmor weapons available to the Marine MCATF commander and those available to his Soviet or Soviet-equipped counterpart. (See Figure 5.) In the past we could deal with this disparity by use of concealment—smoke in the attack and camou-



* The graph for the MRR does not reflect RPGs or SPGs due to the requirement to dismount to employ these weapons. Nor does it show the 73mm/30mm gun of the BMPs since a single gunner must employ both the gun and the Spandrel missile.

** The battalion-sized MCATF is an infantry battalion reinforced with a tank company and a TOW section.

*** The shaded area represents the superiority of the MRR at all ranges from 4,000 meters in to 200 meters.

Figure 5

flage in the defense. Now the presence of thermal sights changes everything, and since almost everyone else already has access to these devices, we must have an immediate fix.

There is a tendency in the American Armed Forces to always seek a technological fix. We can't wait for the standard technological "fix." Two things must be done now. First, we must change the attitude of all Marines concerning the importance of thermal sights. Second, we must change our tactics to maximize the effect of our sights while nullifying the enemy's.

Changing Attitudes

Throughout the history of war, changing the attitudes of military professionals has been one of the most important and difficult tasks to accomplish. In most cases, outmoded attitudes have been overcome only when both men and officers have seen the effectiveness of new techniques or weapons. All too often, this demonstration has taken place in combat.

The first step is to ensure everyone in your command—everyone from rifleman to regimental commander—has a clear idea of the effect thermals have on the battlefield. This can be accomplished by a series of steps:

• Acquire pictures like those in this article so that each Marine can see for himself that camouflage, smoke, and darkness are no longer the protection they once were. Small units should make use of these pictures to start discussion on how to defeat thermals. Leaders must talk their Marines through the changes needed in techniques of movement, siting positions, etc. Then they must go to the field and practice.

• Make use of the thermal assets available in your command. Every infantry battalion has 16 Dragon night sights and each regiment has 24 TOW systems. As a matter of priority, units must take these devices to the field and let Marines observe other units maneuvering. Tie their observations to the discussion of the previous paragraph. Drive home how vulnerable everyone is to observation by these devices.

• Determine how you can use thermal camouflage netting, reverse slope, or other techniques to defeat thermal sights. Aggressively explore the limits of the capabilities of the scope to ensure your Marines have a good idea of what they can and cannot get away with against a thermally equipped foe.

• Use your thermally equipped units in the reconnaissance role. Antimech leaders may object that these weapons are too valuable to be used in a reconnaissance role. Yet the Marine commander has no choice if he wants to see the same battlefield as his thermally equipped enemy. Thus your antimech Marines must be drilled extensively in how to move, observe, and communicate accurately and quickly.

Tactical Changes

While there is a need to consider the impact of thermal devices on the entire spectrum of warfare, considerations on that scale vastly exceed the scope of this article. Instead, I hope this discussion can serve as a point of departure for the real work of examining the effect of thermals on today's battlefield. That work will have to be accomplished by Marines throughout the Corps, particularly by those in the Fleet Marine Force.

Offense

With the advent of thermal devices, a number of aspects concerning our offensive doctrine must be considered:

• The requirement to employ covered (not just concealed) routes.

• In mounted attacks, the increased requirement for extensive supporting arms and direct fire overwatch forces.

• In dismounted attacks, more infantry weapons will have to be employed in a suppressive role, while fewer men are exposed by moving in the assault. We should reexamine the supporting to attacking ratios that Rommel used in World War I. (In Rommel's book *Attacks*, you can trace his progression from the standard 1/3 base of fire, 2/3 attaching to the 8/9 firing and only 1/9 attacking that he employed late in the war.)

• The diminished advantages of employing smoke or conducting night attacks.

• The requirement to discard our outmoded doctrine for conducting night attacks and think of it as really being daylight for the enemy's heavy weapons. We will have to cease using company, platoon, and squad release points. These methods simply provide the enemy machinegunners with tightly packed columns—perfect targets—in prime killing zones.

Defense.

Thermal sights will rob the defender of the inherent advantage of a stationary, camouflaged position. Since the attacker's reconnaissance elements will be able to see any front slope position long before his main forces enter an area, the attacker gains the advantage of knowing the defender's dispositions.

This fact combined with the Soviet-equipped force's superiority in long-range weapons means we cannot continue to use front slope defenses. If we do, we will be destroyed at long range without

ever getting the opportunity to fight back. To illustrate, let's continue our scenario from the opening of this article:

The badly battered MAGTF has fallen back behind the LD and reoccupied its defensive positions. Although shaken, the MCATF commander is confident that from his carefully prepared positions, he can hold. The position is ideal. He occupies the front slope firmly with clear fields of fire out to 4,000 meters. Although battered, his Marines, firing from well-camouflaged positions, will rapidly attrit the enemy as he tries to rush across the open ground. The situation looks good. (In truth, however, the MCATF is a sitting duck for a thermally equipped Soviet motorized rifle regiment (MRR).)

The Soviet reconnaissance unit moves to the edge of the open area and scans ahead with its thermal devices. As is obvious from the pictures accompanying this article, he has no difficulty in identifying each friendly position. He reports to the MRR commander who immediately orders his artillery to prep those positions while the lead battalions come on line. As the range closes to 4,000 meters, the BMPs halt and loose a volley of Spandrels at all Marine TOW and tank positions. Using the thermals to sort through the dust and smoke, a second volley is launched to account for any missed by the first.

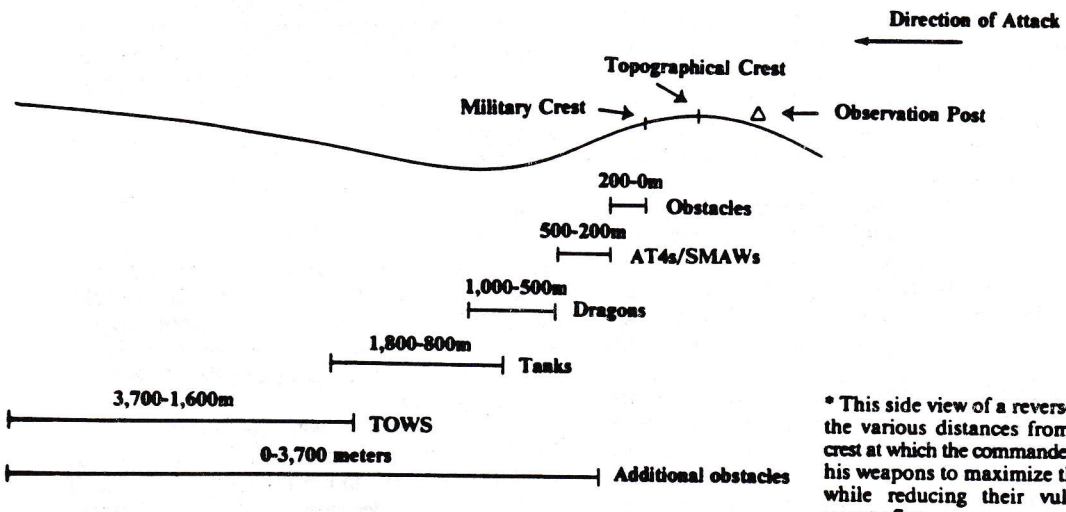
The MRR continues to advance to 2,000 meters. At this range the tanks and BMPs begin firing from short halts, destroying each and every heavy weapons position clearly outlined in their thermal sights. As these are accounted for, the enemy shifts to individual fighting positions. By the time the MRR closes to within 500 meters, 90 percent of the fighting holes have been hit by direct fire.

While its supporting arms have taken a toll, the MCATF has been unable to respond with direct fire. Each of its direct fire weapons was knocked out before the enemy came within range. The MRR doesn't even bother to dismount but simply rolls through the shattered battalion landing team (BLT).

Grim as this scenario sounds, it represents the probable outcome of using a forward slope defense against a thermally equipped MRR. Consider instead how a well-integrated reverse slope defense would have fared against such an attack. As shown in Figure 6, the defense is established in depth with the infantry fighting positions only 150-250 meters back from the military crest of the reverse slope—within both LAAW and AT4 range. From these positions, every infantryman is an armor killer. Somewhat farther back are the SMAWs, well dispersed but covering all the ground to the military crest. Yet further back are the Dragons, backed up by the tanks and TOWs deployed to a depth of 3,500 meters.

Gaps are covered by weapons sited to fire into the flanks of any penetrating force. The forward slope is occupied only by supporting arms observers in well-constructed sniper hides built by the battalion STA platoon. (With an aperture of only 4-6 inches and no weapons firing, these positions are virtually invisible even to thermals.) Given this reverse slope posture, the battle could unfold

REVERSE SLOPE DEFENSE



* This side view of a reverse slope shows the various distances from the military crest at which the commander could deploy his weapons to maximize their strengths while reducing their vulnerability to counterfire.

Figure 6

like this:

The BLT waits in its reverse slope defense. The enemy advance guard moves cautiously into the open. After scanning the area ahead and detecting no positions, it begins the long movement across the open ground. Suddenly it is being hit by observed artillery fire, followed immediately by TOW Cobras, which destroy the remaining vehicles. The unseen Marine observers have taken their toll. Having previously lost his recon and advance party and unable to contact his advance guard, the MRR commander suspects a trap. Knowing U.S. tactics, he begins pounding the front slope of the next high ground with artillery. Simultaneously, he deploys two of his battalions on line and moves rapidly across the open ground.

In spite of his efforts, artillery and air power continue hitting his unit. With vehicles being damaged all around him, the MRR commander orders an increase in speed hoping to get out of this valley of death.

Finally, the MRR crosses the military crest of the reverse slope, only to find itself in a hornet's nest. Suddenly, the commander is confronted with a massive barrage of antiarmor weapons coming from ranges of 100 to 3,500 meters. If he attempts to charge on, he will be subjected to fires from all sides. If he dismounts his infantry, they will be hit by small arms fire from every direction before they can even get organized. If he withdraws, he will be hit by a rain of preregistered indirect fire. If he calls for supporting arms, his artillery will be required to place indirect fire on a reverse slope, a difficult prospect even under the best of conditions. The armor commander's nightmare has come true. He is fighting for his life at short range against well-disciplined, dug-in infantry.

This scenario's primary lesson for the defense is that we must prevent the thermally equipped enemy from pinpointing every position in our defense.

The scenario further shows how the application of tactical sense overcame the technical advantage provided by both thermal devices and the superior range of enemy weapons.

First, the use of the reverse slope to preserve surprise threw the MRR commander off balance. Second, the use of reverse slope allowed us to dictate the conditions of the engagement, ensuring we had a preponderance of firepower at the crucial time. Finally, by positioning our weapons in depth and allowing all of them to engage simultaneously, we vastly complicated the enemy's target aquisition and engagement problems.

Thus the MCATF commander has regained all of the advantages of the defense while neutralizing the technology of the attacker.

Conclusion

Although this scenario shows a defense against a conventional armored attack, the requirement to consider the way thermal sights reshape the battlefield applies across a wide range of situations and potential opponents.

This discussion touches just the surface of how thermal imagery will affect the battlefield.

Many questions still remain. What is the best use of thermals in the offense? How do you conduct an ambush against a thermally equipped enemy? How will thermal devices be used in patrolling?

These questions and innumerable others cry out for answers—answers now! It is up to Marines throughout the Corps, but particularly those in the operating forces, to ask all these questions and then seek and find the answers.

The alternative is to repeat France, 1940.

US MC

Quote to Ponder:

Goodbye Darkness

" Darkness, clouds, or bad weather will no longer give respite to troops in battle. Modern technology is providing vision devices that can pierce night and fog . . . . [These devices] will certainly affect tactics by night and their capabilities and defences against them must be incorporated into all future operations."

Col Andrew R. Cattaway,
Canadian Armed Forces
in *NATO Sixteen Nations*, Aug85

Critiquing 'No Place to Hide'

☐ Maj Hammes recent article on the battlefield impact of thermal imagery devices presents an excellent case for the rear slope defense. Even if the enemy is not equipped with thermal image devices, the rear slope defense is a technique that offers significant advantages to the defender.

When the Germans introduced the rear slope defense in 1917, their enemies had an overwhelming superiority in artillery, the bulk of which consisted of guns that were incapable of high angle fire. There was thus a "dead zone" behind every slope that could be reached by only a small percentage of the enemy's shells. Present day Marines could very well find themselves in a similar situation. Soviet-style armies, as we all know, are equipped with prodigious amounts of firepower. Because much of this consists of flat trajectory weapons (field guns, tank guns, ATGMs, and multiple rocket launchers) one sure way of cutting down this advantage is to locate on the rear slope.

One of the inherent advantages of the offensive is that the attacker can mass his combat power while the defender must fight with what he has at hand. The rear slope defense reduces the ability of the attacker to "gang up" on the defender. Attacking over a crest, he must expose part of his force (the "first wave," if you will) to the defender's fire while the rest of his force is unable to support the attack in any significant fashion. The attacker is thus forced to fight a series of small uncoordinated battles rather than a single engagement where he can use his superior numbers to overwhelm the defenses.

Another advantage often held by the attacker is the ability to locate the probable positions of key weapons. A reasonably competent enemy will know the capabilities of our weapons and be able to read terrain to determine fields of fire and dead ground. Placing defensive positions on the rear slope forces the enemy to attack into the unknown or, at the very least, hazard a reconnaissance aircraft.

Capt Bruce I. Gudmundsson, USMCR

☐ Maj Hammes' article, "No Place to Hide," is well written and well thought out. Making the use of a reverse slope defense is something all tactical commanders should immediately take to heart. The rote occupation of the forward slope by Marine units is something that must come to a halt.

However, two things in the article trouble me. First, the diagram depicting a side view of a reverse slope defense is labeled incorrectly. The military crest of the terrain displayed is on the other side of the topographical crest. By definition, the military crest is "an area on the forward slope of a hill or ridge from which maximum observation covering the slope down to the base of the hill or ridge can be obtained." The area labeled as the military crest is in fact the reverse slope. Also, the weapons ranges and the way they are drawn give the impression that all fires will not be delivered to control the topographical crest. The control of the topographical crest by fire is the *key* to the reverse slope defense. All weapons, from small arms to tank main gun and TOW fires, though positioned in depth, are sighted to fire on the enemy as soon as he appears on the crest. Finally, the diagram fails to show the location of the counter-slope. This is the main area for the positioning of not only the reserve force, which can from this location support the frontline unit by fire, but for all of our long-range shooters . . . .

Lastly, though the use of the reverse slope will mask the defender from direct ground fire and observation, his thermal signature will still be visible from the air. Our ground forces can no longer discount the potential of an enemy air capability.

Maj Robert B. Neller

☐ Thanks for forwarding Maj Neller's thoughtful comments on "No Place To Hide". His points are well made, and I would like to address each in turn.

First, concerning the definition of the military crest. *OH 0-3 Field Commander's Guide to Weather and Terrain* (Apr86) does not use Maj Neller's definition. It states "The *military crest* is the highest point on a hill or ridge from which good observation down the side of a hill can be obtained. This may be different from the *topographic crest*, which is the highest point . . . . Some hills or ridges do not have military crests." In this definition the military crest is a topographic feature that is dependent solely on terrain formation and independent of any military use of the ground. In any event, the point where "maximum observation covering the slope down to the base of the hill or ridge can be obtained" is as vitally important on the reverse slope as it is on the forward slope. It needs a name, and I chose the label military crest, which *OH 0-3* seems to support.

Second, concerning the fact that the diagram does not reflect the ideal reverse slope defense. I intentionally did not use the ideal diagram. I am convinced that one of the reasons Marines do not use the reverse slope defense is they can rarely find an ideal geographic layout for such a defense. Therefore, they naturally select the more familiar forward slope defense. One of the essential points of the article is that Marines must be willing to adapt reverse slope doctrine to geographic reality to gain the critical protection it provides from direct fire weapons. For instance in the "B" Corridor at Twentynine Palms, there are few ideal reverse slope positions. But there are numerous positions where a small rise can be placed between the enemy and friendly defenses. While not ideal, these positions can protect our defensive positions from the superior range and number of enemy direct fire weapons until the enemy draws within range of our weapons. Since these positions provide no counter slope, we must make use of the small depressions, dry stream beds, etc., to position our long-range weapons and reserves.

Third, while it may be correct doctrinally to concentrate all weapons on the topographical crest of the hill, it is often impractical and ineffective. For instance, if the reverse slope military crest (for lack of a better term) is only 100 meters back from the topographical crest and there is no counter slope, all friendly direct fire weapons would have to be crammed into that 100 meters. Such a deployment is obviously tactically unsound. Instead, the commander should cover that short piece of ground with indirect fire weapons and any long-range weapons that can reach it from farther back. He will then concentrate the majority of his weapons on defending the rest of the reverse slope. The alternative to conceding that 100 meters of high ground covered by our indirect fire is to use a forward slope defense. Those 100 meters of fire swept high ground are a minor concession compared to the tremendous advantage gained by use of the reverse slope.

Finally, Maj Neller's point on enemy air is well taken. I was remiss in not addressing that threat. Our ground units must be conscious of the importance of reducing their vulnerability to airborne thermal sensors. In fact, the presence of enemy air makes it even more sound tactically to defend from the reverse slope. While enemy airborne sensors can still see our positions, they must fly high enough and far enough forward to see over the hill. Thus, we can force enemy aircraft to expose themselves to our air defense weapons. Using the reverse slope denies the enemy the luxury of orbiting well behind his lines while examining our positions through long-range thermal devices. He can only see us by placing himself at risk. That is the best an infantryman can hope for when faced by enemy air.

Maj Neller's thoughtful comments represent exactly the kind of professional dialog that is desperately needed to develop the reverse slope defense into the powerful tactical equalizer light forces need to face armored forces. I hope it is but the first of a number of letters and articles on this subject.

Maj Thomas X. Hammes

The Reverse Slope Defense

by Col Michael D. Wyly

The most prophetic warning in Maj Tom Hammes' excellent piece, "No Place to Hide" (*MCG*, Jul87), occurs near the end of the article: "We cannot continue to use front slope defenses. If we do, we will be destroyed."

I have long felt that study and practice of forward slope defenses in the 1980s is about as relevant as forming squares to repel cavalry. That is, one may profit from understanding how the concept worked with yesterday's weapons, but any serious notion of applying the same thing today would indicate ignorance of modern technology.

I felt no small embarrassment in 1982 when a British officer wrote that their attacks on Argentine positions in the Falklands were always successful because the Argentines used "American tactics." The tactic he was referring to was the forward slope defense.

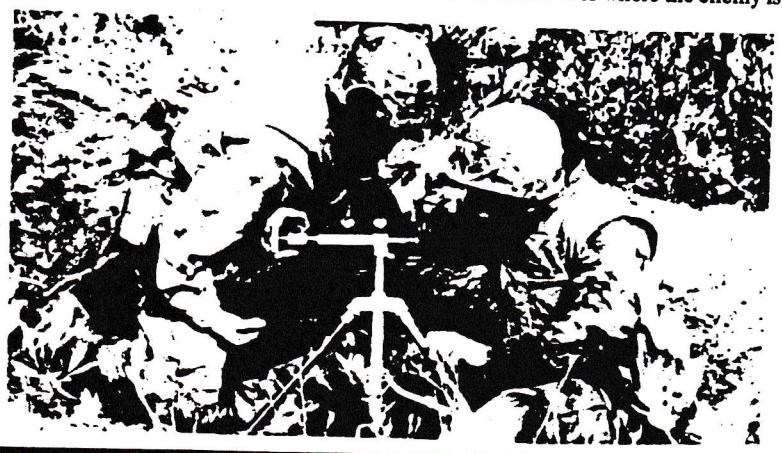
I trust that by now we are placing our primary emphasis on reverse slope defense in the Fleet Marine Force and at The Basic School and that the forward slope is finally taking its place as an option for exceptional cases if not a historical curiosity. The lesson, after all, is one that was learned the hard way. Rendered less than efficacious when modern artillery and the machine-gun dominated the battlefields of World War I, forward slope positions cost thousands of lives. We seemed unable to rise above what had been codified in doctrine. The forward slope sometimes served useful purposes through World War II and the Korean War in situations where long-range engagements were desired in order to keep the enemy at arm's length. But that was when camouflage and darkness could effectively conceal our positions. That is, before thermal imagery technology. By Vietnam, forward slope positions supported our body-count mentality. We could use them to inflict kills at long range. Sometimes the enemy launched major attacks against them. These attacks were more costly to him than to us. However, the cost was in the form of attrition. The enemy could always quit when he had had enough. This is a major fallacy of the forward slope defense: the enemy can always go home. He has the initiative. We need to destroy him before he gets home. Let him lie unburied on the battlefield.

In Vietnam, reverse slope defenses represented a form of ambush. To my knowledge they were only employed by a few innovative small unit leaders who were insightful enough to try things that weren't generally in the books. The Basic School and infantry training regiments were still emphasizing the forward slope. Surprise reverse slope positions bring about the kind of decisive engagement that Maj Hammes describes where the enemy is "fighting for his life at short range against well-disciplined, dug-in infantry." The reverse slope is a trap. The attacker commits himself and cannot withdraw. Doctrine that says reverse slope defensive fires should all focus in the topographical crest is flawed. If we only practiced it enough to understand its beauty, we would see that its decisiveness results from destroying the enemy in a position he cannot get out of.

Night, fog, and smoke are still useful, but we must realize that thermal imagery means that they will no longer conceal, only obscure. "If you can be seen, you can be hit; if hit, killed" will not always be true in combat in any age. The wily tactician will take advantage of the confusion that may prevent him from being seen in the first place, despite technology. The irony of technology is that because of it, foot soldiers and small unit leadership have become more important. Airborne thermal imagery will detect heavy equipment no matter what side of the hill it's on. The rising importance of the single man on foot is evidenced in the emergence of modern terrorism. Of significance to us is the individual Marine with a light, lethal weapon who can think. He must know how to use terrain to protect himself and to destroy the enemy. That means he understands reverse slopes.

Maj Hammes has done a superlative job of demonstrating how thermal imagery has caused the forward slope defense to be no longer defensible. But it is well that the technology of thermal imagery is finally forcing us to abandon a technique that deserves to go the way of the thin red line and linear attacks to the beat of a drum. For years, the forward slope has stymied our thinking, made our Marines vulnerable, and deterred us from closing with the enemy. A well-chosen reverse slope position, well staked out with outposts and designed to suck the enemy in irrevocably, is *maneuver* at its finest.

USMC



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MCI - R-11

DATE SENT:

COURSE TITLE

COURSE NUMBER

Section 1. Student Identification

RANK INITIALS LAST NAME MOS

SSN REPORTING UNIT CODE (RUC)

MILITARY ADDRESS

INSTRUCTIONS: Print or type name, rank, and address clearly. Include ZIP CODE. Only Class III Reservists may use civilian address.

Section 2. Check the appropriate box and fill in the appropriate spaces. FOR REGULAR AND CLASS II RESERVE MARINES, THIS FORM MUST BE SIGNED BY THE COMMANDING OFFICER OR HIS REPRESENTIVE, i.e. TRANING OFFICER.

1. CHANGE. The following information needs correction:

	From	To
Name		
Rank		
SSN		
RUC		

2. MATERIALS. The following materials are needed: Lessons ____ Manual ____ Answer Sheets ____ Other ____

3. EXAM OVERDUE. The last lesson was sent in on _____.

4. MISSING RESULTS. The exam was sent in on _____. (If not received at MCI a new exam will be issued).

5. MISSING DIPLOMA. The course was completed in _____ 19____.

6. EXTEND. (Students are only eligible for one extension prior to their CCD).

7. REENROLL. (Students are only eligible for reenrollment once and only after their CCD. If already reenrolled and disenrolled, a new enrollment must be requested).

8. OTHER (EXPLAIN): _____

NOTE: This form will not be returned by MCI. If the request is valid, the transaction will show on next UAR or on MCI-R-1 Form.

SIGNATURE - TITLE OR RANK
(MUST BE CO. OR REPRESENTATIVE)
ATV _____

DATA REQUIRED BY THE PRIVACY ACT OF 1974
(5 U.S.C. 522A)

1. AUTHORITY: Title 5 USC Sec. 301 Use of your Social Security Number is authorized by Executive Order 9397 of 22 Nov 43.

2. PRINCIPAL PURPOSE: The Student Request/Inquiry is used to transmit information concerning student participation in MCI courses.

3. ROUTINE USES: This information is used by MCI personnel to research student inquiries. In some cases information contained therein is used to update individual student records maintained by the Marine Corps Institute.

4. MANDATORY OR VOLUNTARY DISCLOSURE AND EFFECT ON INDIVIDUAL NOT PROVIDING INFORMATION: Disclosure is voluntary. Failure to provide information may result in the provision of incomplete service to your inquiry. Failure to provide your Social Security Number will delay the processing of your inquiry request.

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UNITED STATES

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MARINE CORPS INSTITUTE
ARLINGTON, VA 22223-0001